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JOURNEY THROUGH THE BHAGAVAD GITA

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Introduction

Om Ganeshaaya Namahaa

I DECIDED TODAY to begin a blog that is my attempt to understand the Bhagavad Gita.

I can't remember the exact date, but it was around 5 years ago that I chanced upon a television program in India where a prominent teacher of the Gita was conducting a discourse in English, stripped of all the usual pomp and ceremonial activities that usually accompany a discourse. As I watched that program, I realized that there is something here that is attracting me, but I could not quite explain why. I tried to watch that program as often as possible during my 3 month stay in India.

When I returned to the US to continue my work, those Gita discourses stuck in my head. I began to buy commentaries on the Gita from several authors, and eventually came across a teacher whose audio discourses resonated with me. Now I am looking at the end of the 18th chapter (the last chapter) of the Gita, and having gone through it over the course of 2 years, still feel a need to understand it deeply.

This blog is my attempt to restart my journey of the Gita, beginning with the first verse of chapter 1. But this time, I want to go deeper and understand each verse to the best of my ability. I will keep the language as simple as possible, and provide examples that I and most people can relate to.

Seeker 2011



Arjuna Vishaada Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 1**Dhritraashtra uvaacha:**dharmakshetre kurukshetre samavetaa yuyutsavaha |**maamakaaha paandavaashchaiva kimakurvata sanjaya || 1 ||*

dharmakshetre : in the field of dharma

kurukshetre : in the field of the Kurus

samavetaa : gathered here

yuyutsavaha : in order to fight

eva : also

kim : what

sanjaya : O Sanjaya

Dhritrashtra said: In Kurukshetra, the field of the Kurus and also the field of righteousness, both my sons and Pandu's sons gathered, eager to fight. What did they do, O Sanjaya?

So begins the first chapter of the Gita. The first chapter is a dialog between Dhritrashtra, father of the Kauravas and Sanjaya, his charioteer and also his adviser. Sanjaya was given divine vision so that he could provide a real-time commentary on the Mahabharata war for the sightless Dhritrashtra.

This verse begins to reveal one of the recurring themes of the Gita - the downside of extreme attachment to objects or situations. Dhritrashtra means someone who clings to his kingdom, and Sanjaya means victory. Dhritrashtra was extremely attached to his sons and his kingdom, which is one of the reasons that the Mahabharata war occurred. He refers to his nephews as "Pandu's sons" indicating that they are a 3rd party, whereas his sons are referred to as "my sons".

What exactly is attachment? Here's an example. Let's say Mr. X brought a brand new car. He shows it to all his friends, they ooh and they aah, his spouse is happy, his kids are jumping up and down and so on. When he hears all the praises, there usually is something inside him that "puffs up". That thing is the ego. Now let's say a few weeks have passed. It's morning and as he opens the car door, he notices a large dent on the side of the car. He begins to experience anger, sadness, and a whole host of other emotions.

What just happened? It was attachment to the car. Mr. X's ego created an identification with the new car. In other words, it began to think of the car as an extension of its identity. So any praise for the car became the ego's praise, and any harm to the car became the ego's harm. The ego strengthens itself by attachment, i.e. identification with objects,

Notes

1. Eckhart Tolle talks about ego and attachment in his books "The Power Of Now" and "A New Earth".

2. Per the Dnyaneshwari commentary, the word "dharmakshetre" here suggests that Kurukshetra battleground had a positive energy that was known to bring senseless warriors to their senses and make them behave rationally. Perhaps Dhritrashtra wanted to know whether that positive energy compelled his sons the Kauravas to give up the idea of war

thoughts (I am smart, I am sincere etc), positions (e.g. right wing vs left wing).

So what is the practical lesson here? Later chapters and verses will go in detail into this subject, but till then, this verse urges us to examine our life and take stock of our attachments. What are our attachments? How strong are those attachments? What can we do to prevent ourselves getting entangled in more and more attachments?

Also - at this point, do we think that all attachments are bad? Or are some good? Upon introspection we will find the answers. The Gita will begin to address those questions as we go further into it.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 1**Sanjaya uvaacha:**dhristvaa tu paandavaanikam vyoodham duryodhanstadaa |
aachaaryamupasangmaya raaja vachanambraveet || 2 ||*

Sanjaya said: Observing that the Pandava army was organized into a military formation, Duryodhana approached his teacher Drona and spoke these words.

tadaa: during that time
vyoodham: organized into a military formation
paandavaanikam: the Pandava army
dhristvaa: observing
tu: and
aachaaryam: Dronacharya
upasangmaya: approached
raaja: king
duryodhan: Duryodhana
vachanam: words
abraveet: spoke

Let's look at the character that is introduced in this verse - Duryodhana. Duryodhana was the son of Dhritrashtra, and leader of the Kaurava army in the Mahabharata war. He was a skilled and strong warrior, almost equal in prowess to Bhima, the strongest warrior in the Pandava army.

Since childhood, Duryodhana grew up with the idea that he was the rightful heir to the throne and not Yudhishtira, who was the eldest brother of the Pandavas. Going back to the theme of the previous verse which is that of attachment, he was extremely attached to the throne. But because he perceived the Pandavas as an obstacle to the throne, which was something that he was extremely attached to, he developed an aversion towards them.

Think of aversion or in other words, hatred, as the polar opposite of attachment. But interestingly enough, it is born out of attachment itself. For example, we saw that Mr. X from the last post was extremely attached to his car, and saw that someone had made a large dent in it. What feeling do you think Mr. X had for the person who caused that dent? That is aversion. Aversion is usually caused when we perceive a person, situation or object as an obstacle between us and the object of our attachment. And aversion, just like attachment, strengthens the ego. Examples are people (I hate my boss), objects (I hate my old TV), positions (I hate anyone who believes in communism) or situations (I hate my job).

Now, why did Duryodhana approach his teacher Drona? He saw the military formation of the Pandavas and began to get scared. As is the

Notes

1. There is a redundancy here in the phrase "vachanambraveet". Usually if you write "say", most people know that you mean "say words". But here the word "abraveet" is used in addition to "vachana". This could mean that the words that Duryodhana is going to speak in the next verse are not ordinary words, they could perhaps be very negative or hurtful.

case, most people run to someone superior when they get scared, so he approached his teacher for counsel.

Drona was a teacher to both the Pandavas and Kauravas, and had equal affinity to both of them. And unlike some of the other senior warriors, Drona was not a blood relation to the Kauravas. Duryodhana also sensed that he needs to check in with Drona to understand his state of mind, because he needed Drona's prowess to win this war.

There is an interesting leadership lesson here. If you are leading a team - in a business, political or any context - your success is not guaranteed unless everyone buys into a common vision that you as a leader have articulated.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 1

*pashyaitaam paanduputraanaamaachaarya mahatim chamoom |
vyoodham drupadaputrena tava shishyena dheemata || 3 ||*

Teacher, behold this mighty Pandava army, that your intelligent student Dhrishtadyumna, son of Drupada, has organized in a military formation for battle.

aachaarya: teacher
tava: your
dheemata: intelligent
shishyena: student
drupadaputrena: son of Drupada
vyoodham: organized in military formation
paanduputraanaam: of the Pandavas
etaam: this
mahatim: mighty
chamoom: army
pashya: see or behold

The Gita has many conversations-within-conversations, so it is useful to keep track. In the first two verses, Sanjaya and Dhritrashtra were talking, and in this verse, Duryodhana is addressing his teacher Drona.

Here we begin to explore another theme of the Gita which is that of mental equanimity, or as sometimes it is referred to, "even keelness". We are at our best when our mind, the part of our brain that feels emotions, is calm and not agitated. When our mind is calm it enables our intellect, the part of our brain that evaluates options and makes rational decisions, to give us the most logical way out of a situation. In the TV show "Star Trek", Mr. Spock was always consulted to provide the best decision because he would never take emotions into considerations when making a decision.

In the last verse we saw that Duryodhana wanted to ensure that Drona was sufficiently motivated to fight against his students the Pandavas, lest he become weak due to having a soft spot for them. So Duryodhana attempted to disturb Drona's equanimity by reminding him that the leader of the military formation that is in front of them is the son of Drupada.

Drupada and Drona had a chequered past. They were the best of friends, but due to some misunderstandings, they turned into sworn enemies. By reminding Drona that Drupada's son Dhrishtadyumna is leading the opposing army, Duryodhana wanted to stir up Drona's emotions so that he think that his students purposely put Dhrush-

tadyumna in front, just to spite Drona.

Do we have such biases or filters in our lives through which we view people or situations? How were they formed? Did some Duryodhana plant them in us? Uncovering such biases makes our decision-making clearer and simpler.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 4-6, Chapter 1

atra shoora maheshvaasaa bheemarjunasamaa yudhi |
yuyudhaano viraatashcha drupadashcha mahaarathaha || 4 ||
dhrishtaketushchekitaanah kaashirajascha veeryavan |
purujitkuntibhojashcha shaibyascha narapungvaha || 5 ||
yudhamanyushcha vikraanta uttamaujaashcha veeryavan |
saubhadro draupadeyashcha sarva eva mahaarathaaha || 6 ||

This army has mighty archers such as Yuyudhaana, King Viraata and Drupada who are equal to Bheema and Arjuna in battle. Other powerful warriors include Dhrishtaketu, Chekitaana, the gallant king of Kashi, Purujit, Kuntibhoja, Yuyudhaana, Uttamauja, Abhimanyu and all the sons of Draupadi.

Duryodhana continued his attempt to incite Drona to fight aggressively against the opposing army by calling out the mighty warriors on the other side. He chose each name carefully to elicit a reaction from Drona, since each of these warriors had a history with Drona.

Yuyudhaana was Arjuna's top student, and Duryodhana wanted to point out that although Arjuna's top student was fighting on his teacher's side, Drona's top student Arjuna was fighting against his teacher. Drupada also was someone that Drona disliked, as was pointed out earlier. Dhrishtaketu's father had been killed by Krishna, yet he was on the side of the Pandavas. Chekitaana was the only Yadava warrior not taking the side of the Kauravas.

The king of Kashi was an exceptionally gallant warrior, and took the side of the Pandavas. Yudhamanyu and Uttamauja were exceptional warriors from the Paanchaala kingdom. Purujit and Kuntibhoja were Kunti's maternal brothers who were also related to the Kauravas, but chose the side of the Pandavas. Shaibya was Yudhishtira's father-in-law, similarly related to the Kauravas. Abhimanyu, Arjuna's son, was well versed in the art of breaking military formations. Duryodhana disliked Draupadi immensely, so her sons were pointed out as well.

We begin to see how interrelated the warring parties were. Some were friends who turned into enemies, some were relatives who chose sides, and some like Drona were equally loving to both sides, but had to choose one based on their duty to the throne and the kingdom.

atra: here
 shoora: brave
 maheshvaasaa: with giant bows
 cha: and
 yudhi: in battle
 bheemarjunasamaa: equal to Bheem and Arjuna
 yuyudhaana: Yuyudhaana
 viraata: King Viraata
 mahaarathaha: mighty warriors
 drupadaha: Drupad
 dhrishtaketu: Dhrishtaketu
 chekitana: Chekitaana
 purujitaha: Purujit
 kuntibhoja: Kuntibhoja
 shaibya: Shaibya
 kaashirajaha: King of Kashi
 veeryavaan: gallant
 yudhamanya: Yudhamanyu
 uttamaujaaha: Uttamaujaaha
 saubhadraha: son of Subhadra which is Abhimanyu
 draupadeyaaha: sons of Draupadi
 sarva: everyone
 eva: all
 maharaathaaha: mighty warriors

It is a reminder that nothing in our lives stays the same. A relationship that gives you lot of joy today, could in a matter of seconds turn into a sorrowful relationship at some point.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 1

*asmaakam tu vishishta ye taannibodha dvijottama |
naayakaa mama sainskyasya sangnyartham taanbraveemi te || 7 ||*

O twice-born Drona, now I would like to bring to your addition to our competent warriors. Let me point you to some of my army's commanders.

Duryodhana continued his conversation with Drona in this verse. As is apparent from the text of the verse, he wanted to now talk to Drona about his army, having assessed the capabilities of the Pandava army.

Notice how each verse gives an indication of Duryodhana's state of mind. Initially, he saw the well-formed army of the Pandavas that was marching with a single vision, and began to worry that it may prove to be a formidable opponent. His worry prompted him to instigate Drona. Now in this verse Duryodhana's worry unleashed a condescending, mean attitude by calling Drona a "twice born".

Twice-born usually refers to individuals in the brahman, kshatriya and vaishya classes. However, in this verse, this was a veiled insult because although Drona was an accomplished warrior, he was a brahmin by birth. Duryodhana wanted to imply that Drona, being a brahmin, would be soft on his disciples the Pandavas. In addition, use of the phrase "my army" also indicates that Duryodhana's ego was puffed up at this point.

Negative emotions like fear and worry, when allowed to simmer in the mind, tend to unleash the worst in us. Later, the Gita will go in great detail into how this happens.

dvija-uttama: O twice born
asmaakam: on our side
tu: also
ye: those
vishishtaaha: select
taan: on them
nibodhaa: to draw your attention
te: for you
sangya-artham: indicate for your information
mama: my
sainyasya: army
naayakaaha: commanders
taan: about them
braveemi: I will speak

Notes

1. In Swami Ramdas Samaratha's Dasbodh, there is an entire chapter on signs exhibited by foolish people. According to him, anyone who insults his guru out of pride is considered a fool.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 1

*bhavaanibheeshmashcha karnashcha kripashcha samitinjayaha |
ashvaththaama vikarnashcha soumaduttistathaiva cha || 8 ||*

We have victorious warriors such as yourself, Bheeshma, Kripaachaarya and Karna on our side. Similarly, we also have Ashvaththaama, Vikarna and Bhoorishrava.

bhavaan: yourself
cha: and
bheeshmaha: Bheeshma
karna: Karna
samitinjayaha: victorious
kripaha: Kripaachaarya
tathaa eva: and similarly
ashvaththaama: Ashvaththaama
vikarnaha: Vikarna
soumaduttihi: son of Somadutta which
is Bhoorishrava

Having conducted an assessment of the warriors on the Pandava's side, Duryodhana began to conduct a similar assessment of his side.

Throughout the last few verses we were observing Duryodhana's emotional state. After having lobbed an insult at Drona, and not having heard a response back, Duryodhana now became scared that he had angered his army's main commander and his teacher. So he wanted to say something to appease Drona. Hence he began his assessment of powerful warriors by putting Drona first in this verse.

What does this tell us about Duryodhana's personality? Sometimes we tend to view people as either good or evil, and by that logic Duryodhana would be considered evil. But this temporary outpouring of reverence for his teacher shows that Duryodhana had some good qualities in him, although in lower proportion to his bad qualities.

Later the Gita will provide a detailed explanation of types of qualities that all individuals have. At this point, let us consider that all individuals have a mix of three qualities or tendencies: a tendency that draws us towards inertia, another that draws us to action, and another that draws us to equanimity or harmony. Usually, one or two tendencies tend to dominate the other in us.

You may know some people who have a tendency to be lazy and sleep all the time. Or there may be someone who cannot rest and has to keep doing something or the other. Or, there are some who do what's needed to run their lives and are not lazy, and also deal with severe setbacks and challenges while managing to stay calm, collected and even-keel.

What do we think is our most dominant tendency? Are there external factors that change it temporarily? For example, if you find that your most dominant tendency is towards action, are there factors that make

you stable and peaceful?

Bhagavad Gita Verse 9, Chapter 1

*anye cha bahavaha shoora madarthe tyaktajeevitaaha |
naanaashastrapraharanaaha sarve yuddhavishaaradaaha || 9 ||*

In addition to our commanders, we also have several other brave warriors who have vowed to give up their life for me. These warriors are well versed in deploying weapons, and are proficient in the art of battle.

anye: besides these
bahavaha: several
shooraha: brave warriors
madarthe: for me
tyaktajeevitaaha: giving up their desire to live
cha: and
naanaashastrapraharanaaha: versed in the deployment of many weapons
sarve: all of them
yuddhavishaaradaaha: proficient in the art of war

Duryodhana naively tried to impress Drona by glorifying his army. In doing so, his ego resurfaced again, which is evidenced by his self-aggrandizing statements like "they will give up their life for me". He probably was trying to convince (or delude) himself that his army is poised to win the battle.

The tendency of the ego to consider something "mine" is called mamataa in Sanskrit. Mamataa literally means "mine-making" or "mine-ness". This is yet another means for the ego to strengthen itself through possessions.

Here's an interesting exercise. Take something that you know for sure is "yours". Now deeply examine it. Is it really yours? For example, say you own a house. On what basis do you consider it yours? Most probably, it's a legal document that the government issues to you. Well, what happens if that government no longer exists? Or, more likely, what happens if the government grabs that land from you because it possesses some precious natural resources? Is the relationship between you and the house "real"?

Notes

1. Astra denotes weapons that are thrown, and shastra denotes weapons that are hand-held

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 1

aparyaptam tadasmaakam balam bheeshmaabhirikshitam |
paryaptam tvidameteshaam balam bheemaabhirikshitam || 10 ||

asmaakam tat: our army
 tu: but
 eteshaam: these Pandavas
 idam: this
 paryaptam: limited

Whereas our army, defended by Bheeshma's strength, is infinitely capable of victory, the Pandava army defended by Bheema's strength, seems limited.

balam bheemaa-abhirikshitam: defended by Bheema's strength

Duryodhana continued to boast about his army in this final comment to Drona. Note that Drona did not reply to any of Duryodhana's statements at any point in the conversation. His silence indicated either anger, disappointment or knowing the inevitable that his army was doomed to failure.

If you measure Duryodhana's comments, they tend to become increasingly arrogant and hyperbolic throughout the conversation. Anytime you have somebody making hyperbolic statements praising themselves, it usually indicates an underlying insecurity.

Notes¹. In translating this verse I looked up several commentaries, and this is the first verse where I have encountered a difference in translation. Some commentators translate the Sanskrit word "aparyaptam" to mean "beyond sufficient" or "infinitely capable". This is the meaning that I have used above. However, some commentators translate it as "less than sufficient" or "limited capability". If that meaning is taken, that means Duryodhana's fear has broken past the facade of arrogance and he has begun speaking what he really thinks.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 1

*ayaneshu cha sarveshu yathaabhaagamavastithaaha |
bheeshmamevaabhirakshantu bhavantaha sarva eva hi || 11 ||*

All of you should completely protect Bheeshma at all points, situated in each of your various formations.

bhavavtaha: all of you
eva hi: must certainly
abhirakshantu: completely protect
bheeshman: Bheeshma
eva: foremost
sarveshu ayaneshu ca: at all points
avastithaaha: situated
sarve: respectively
yathaa-bhaagam: in your various
formations

Duryodhana instructed his main warriors to ensure Bheesma's safety since the Mahabharata war was about to begin.

Let's do a quick recap. The first chapter opened with Dhristrashtira asking Sanjaya to elaborate on the progress of the war, and that led to Duryodhana's monologue to Drona. After the statement Duryodhana makes in the current verse, he no longer has a "speaking part" in the Gita anywhere.

After this verse, we will encounter a series of verses that get us closer to the start of the battle, and closer to the core of the Gita.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 1

tasya sanjanayanharsham kuruvriddha pitaamaha |
simhanaada vinadyochchai shankamdadhamau prataapavaan || 12 ||

Then the valiant Bheeshma, elder of the Kuru dynasty, blew his conch loudly, a sound as mighty as the roar of a lion, delighting Duryodhana.

prataapavaan: valiant
 kuruvriddhaha pitaamaha: Bheeshma
 who is an elder of the Kuru dynasty
 simhanaada vinadya: roaring like a lion
 shankham dadhamau: blew his conch
 uchchaiha: very loudly
 tasya : in this manner
 harsham : delight
 sanjayan : of the king

This is the first verse in a series of verses which indicate the beginning of the Mahabharata war. Traditionally, conches were blown to announce the start of the war. Bheeshma, sensing the fear in Duryodhana, blew his conch so that Duryodhana felt confident that his army was still on his side.

It also indicates the dependence of Duryodhana's ego on external circumstances, such as the roar of conches, in order to strengthen itself, instead of an innate belief that his army was on his side.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 1

*tataha shankashcha bheryascha panavaanakagomukhaahaa |
sahasaaivaabhyahanyanta sa shabda tumulobhavat || 13 ||*

Immediately thereafter, several conches, bugles, trumpets, kettle-horns and cow-horns resounded simultaneously, growing into a tumultuous sound.

tataha: thereafter
shankha: conches
cha: and
bherya: bugles
panamaanaka: trumpets and kettle-
drums
gomukhaha: cow-horns
sahasaa eva abhyahanyanta: resounded
suddenly and simultaneously
shabdaha: sound
abhavat: became
tumulaha: tumultuous

This is another verse in the sequence of verses that brings us closer to the start of the war. It also suggests that the Kaurava army was happy that their commander Bheeshma was eager to begin the war.

As we progress through this verse into some of the later verses, we cannot help but paint a picture of that battlefield, since the words used in these verses are so evocative. For some of us that grew up in India, we probably tend to dig up memories of watching the Mahabharata on Sunday morning, and maybe those memories are recalled. With this verse, we now have another dimension that adds depth to the picture - that of sound.

The author of these verses clearly intends to paint a rich picture of the battlefield, and the Kaurava army in particular. We shall see why shortly.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 1

tataha shvetair hayair yukte mahati syandane sthitau |
 maadhavaha paandavaschaiva divyau shankau pradadhmatau || 14 ||
And then, seated on a magnificent chariot harnessed to white horses, Shri Krishna and Arjuna blew their divine conches.
 tataha : thereafter
 cha eva: both
 maadhavaha : Shri Krishna
 paandavaha : Arjun
 sthitau : situated
 mahati syandane: on a magnificent chariot
 yukte: harnessed
 shvetaiha : by white
 hayaiha: horses
 pradadhmatau: resounded
 saha: their
 divyau: divine
 shankhau: conches
 With this verse, we are introduced to the key figures in the Bhagavad Gita, as we leave behind Duryodhana and the Kaurava army. Lord Krishna was a divine incarnation or an avatar

tataha : thereafter
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And then, seated on a magnificent chariot harnessed to white horses, Shri Krishna and Arjuna blew their divine conches.

With this verse, we are introduced to the key figures in the Bhagavad Gita, as we leave behind Duryodhana and the Kaurava army. Lord Krishna was a divine incarnation or an *avatar*, and Arjuna was one of the five Pandava princes. Arjuna was considered the most skillful archer and warrior of his time. Shri Krishna was a close friend of Arjuna, and offered to be his charioteer for the Mahabharata war.

The prior verses served to paint a picture of the Kaurava army, that was ready to engage in conflict with the Pandavas. As we move further into the text, the perspective shifts from Duryodhana's viewpoint to Arjuna's.

Notes

1. Many commentaries offer a lot of background from the Mahabharata in order to describe the grandeur of Arjuna's chariot. It was a robust chariot, endowed with several divine powers. A key feature of the chariot was a flag in which Lord Hanumaan had entered in the form of an emblem. Therefore it is said that Lord Hanumaan was one of the few individuals to hear the Gita firsthand.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15-18, Chapter 1

*paanchajanyam hrishikeesho devadattam dhananjayaha |
paundryam dadhamau mahaashankam bheemekarmaa vrikodaraha || 15 ||*

*anantavijayam raaja kuntiputrau yudhistiraha |
nakulaha sahadevashcha sughoshamanipushpakau || 16 ||*

*kashyashcha paramesvasaaha shikhandi cha mahaarathaha |
dhrishthadyumno viraatashcha saatyakischaparaajataha || 17 ||
drupado draupadeyascha sarvashaha pruthiveepate |
saubhadrashcha mahaabaahu shankhaandadhmuh prithakprithak || 18 ||*

Hrishikesha blew his conch named Paanchajanya, Arjuna blew his conch Devadatta, and the fearsome Bheema blew his mighty conch named Paundra. King Yudhishtira, son of Kuntu, blew his conch named Anantavijayam, Nakula and Sahadeva blew their conches named Sughosha and Manipushpaka. The King of Kashi, a supreme archer, the mighty warriors Shikhandi, Dhrishthadyumna, King Virata and Satyaki .. King Drupada, the sons of Draupadi and Abhimanyu, the mighty armed son of Subhadra, all blew their respective conches, O King.

Blowing of the conches was a tradition that signified the start of a war. In other words, once that sound was heard, there was no room for compromise, there was no more vacillation on whether or not to fight, everyone was committed to start the war.

We should remind ourselves again and again that the Gita is first and foremost a practical text on how to lead a balanced life, a life that is in harmony with the world. Therefore, we should try to connect what we read in this text to our own life and experiences.

Arjuna was face to face with the Kaurava army, and the sound of the conches indicated that he was about to deal with an extremely difficult situation - that of war. Most of us also have to deal with extremely difficult situations every day, though usually not that of life or death, but ones with high stakes nevertheless. If you are a student,

paanchajanyam : conch named Paanchajanya
devadattam : conch named Devadatta
paundryam : conch named Paundra
dadhamau : blew
mahaashankam : mighty conch
bheemekarmaa : Bheema
vrikodaraha : one who has extraordinary capacity to imbibe food
anantavijayam : conch named anantavijayam
raaja : king
kuntiputrau : son of Kunti
yudhistiraha : Yudhishtira
nakulaha : Nakula
sahadevashcha : and Sahadeva
sughoshamanipushpakau : conches named Sughosha and Manipushpaka
kashyashcha : King of Kashi
paramesvasaaha : supreme archer
shikhandi : Shikhandi
mahaarathaha : mighty warrior
dhrishthadyumno : Dhrishthadyumna
viraatashcha : King Virata
saatyaki : Saatyaki
aparaajataha : indefeatable
drupado : King Drupada
sarvashaha : all
pruthiveepate : O king
saubhadra : Abhimanyu
mahaabaahu : mighty armed
shankha : conches
dadhmuh : sounded
prithak : their respective

Notes

1. While the Pandava army has well-known conches, the Kaurava army's conches are nameless

then a tough exam is an example. If you have a job, then a upcoming meeting with your boss is is another example.

When I read the blowing of the conches, I recalled a sound from my childhood which for me had similar implications. Early in the morning, at the same time everyday, I would hear the sound of a air raid warning alarm, coming in from the distance. There was no imminent threat of an air raid, that sound was used only to test the warning system. But for me personally, it reminded me that in a few minutes I would have to face the most difficult situation a shy, nerdy kid has to face everyday - school!

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 1

*sa ghosho dhaartaraashtraanaam hridayaani vyadaaryat |
nabhascha prithvīm chaiva tumulo vyanunaadayan || 19 ||*

**That tumultuous sound resounded through the earth and the sky,
shattering the hearts of the sons of Dhritraashtra.**

sa : that
ghosho : sound
dhaartaraashtraanaam : of the sons of
Dhritraashtra
hridayaani : hearts of
vyadaaryat : shattered
nabhascha : sky
prithvīm : earth
chaiva : and
tumulo : tumultuous
vyanunaadayan : resounded

During college years my classmates and I used to participate in inter-college music competitions. Teams from various colleges competed with each other for the "best music team" prize. Usually the teams would all be waiting backstage to be called on to perform, but in the interim they would do "mini rehearsals" where they would sing one or two lines of their song to warm up. What was interesting is that most teams knew who would win just by hearing that two line sample of the song, because it provided a glimpse of that team's talent and preparation.

Similarly, when the Pandavas blew their conches, their sound was much louder and spirited than the Kauravas, even though the Pandava army was a fraction of the Kaurava army. That sound provided a window into the Pandava army's determination and preparation, which had the effect of injecting fear into the hearts of the Kauravas.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 1

*atha vyavasthitaandhrishthva dhaartaraashtraan kapidhvajaha |
 pravrutte shastrasampatte dhanurudyamya paandavaha |
 hrishikesham tada vaakyamidamaaha mahipate || 20 ||*

Now, as he was about to take up arms against the battle-ready sons of Dhritrashtra, Arjuna - whose chariot displayed the emblem of an ape - spoke these words to Hrishiksha, O King.

Did you observe something different here? By now if you have attempted to read aloud any of the shlokas, you realize that they usually follow the same pattern - 2 lines per shloka, 2 quarters per line, 8 syllables per quarter. But in this shloka, we see for the first time that there are 3 lines instead of 2.

This pattern or "meter" is changed every so often to indicate that the listener should play close attention to a particular shloka, or the shlokas that follow.

Let's also look at another aspect that this shloka highlights. The core of the Gita is a dialogue between Shri Krishna and Arjuna. In ancient Indian literature, there exists a tradition of beginning important teachings or messages with the word "atha" which means now. The shlokas so far covered introduction and background, but now, Arjuna starts the dialogue in the next verse, hence the word "atha" is used here.

atha : thereafter
 vyavasthitaandhrishthva : observed that they were getting ready for war
 dhaartaraashtraan : sons of Dhritrashtra
 kapidhvajaha : flag with the emblem of an ape
 pravrutte : while about to engage
 shastrasampatte : releasing of weapons
 dhanurudyamya : taking up his bow
 paandavaha : Arjuna
 hrishikesham : Hrishiksha
 tada : then
 vaakyamidamaaha : spoke these words
 mahipate : O king

Notes

1. The meter followed in the Gita is called "Anushtup Chhanda"
2. Each chapter of the Gita concludes with a sentence that acts as a marker signifying the end of the chapter. These traditions were followed as a means to make memorization easier, among other things. Every end-of-chapter marker contains the phrase "Shri-Krishna-Arjuna-Samvade" which means "a dialogue between Shri Krishna and Arjuna"

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 21-22, Chapter 1**Arjuna uvaaacha:*

senyorubhyormadhye ratham sthaapaya mechyuta | 21 |
yaavadetaannireeksheham yoddhukaamaanvasthan |
kairmayaa saha yodhdhavyamasminranasamudyame || 22 ||

Arjuna said: O infallible one, in preparation for combat, position my chariot between the two armies till I have surveyed those battle-hungry warriors with whom I have to fight.

senyorubhyormadhye : between both
armies
ratham : chariot
sthaapaya : place
achyuta : infallible
yaavat: till I
etaan : those warriors
nireeksheham : I can observe/survey
yoddhukaamaanvasthan : orga-
nized for battle
kaihamayaa : whom I have to
saha : with
yodhdhavyam : fight
asminranasamudyame : in preparation
for combat

And so begins the conversation between Arjuna and Shri Krishna. At this point, Arjuna was firmly in control of the situation, and like any determined warrior, he commanded his charioteer to carry out his instructions.

Similar to the analysis of Duryodhana's emotional state from the previous verses, let us analyze Arjuna's state. Here, it is clear that he was charged up for war, his warrior instincts had kicked into high gear, and he was bursting with self-confidence.

Another point to consider here is how much, like Arjuna, we rely on our sense organs to deliver the right information to our brain so that we can take the right decision and carry out the necessary action that a situation demands. Our sense organs comprise our eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin. Any information that we process must necessarily come from one of these organs. Arjuna was located at some distance from the opposing army, so he knew that he needed to get a better look at the opposing army, and therefore have all the information he needs to make his battle plans.

Sense organs and understanding how they function is a topic that will be discussed at great length in the rest of the Gita.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 23, Chapter 1

*yotsyamaanaanaveksheham ya etetra samaagataahaa |
dhaartraashtrasya durbudhyeryuddhe priyachikeershavaha || 23 ||*

yotsyamaanaan: battle-hungry warriors
avekshe : let me see
aham : I
ye ete atra : those who have
samaagataahaa : gathered
durbudhyer: evil-minded
yuddhe : war
priyachikeershavaha : wanting to adore

Let me see those battle-hungry warriors, those who wish to adore that evil-minded Dhritraashtra's son, who have gathered here to fight this war.

Arjuna's self-confidence and bravado rose to fever pitch. His words indicated disgust for Duryodhana, and everyone associated with him, including Dhritraashtra, who was Arjuna's uncle and a senior figure in the family. Arjuna seemed to say "my victory is guaranteed, my prowess is superior, so let me look at the people that I am going to kill in battle today". He probably also wanted his opponents to take a closer look at him, so that the sight of Arjuna in full warrior mode would further weaken their spirits. Like Duryodhana's comment from a few verses ago "our army is unlimited and theirs is not", this comment indicated that Arjuna's ego was as puffed up as Duryodhana's.

Little did Arjuna know that Shri Krishna was going to totally change his state of mind very, very soon.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 24-25, Chapter 1**Sanjaya uvaacha:**evamukto hrishikesho gudaakeshena bhaarata |**senyorubhayormadhye sthaapayitvaa rathottamam || 24 ||**bheeshmadronapramukhataha sarveshaam cha maheekshitaam |**uvaacha paartha pashyaitaansamavetankuruniti || 25 ||*

Sanjay said: O descendant of Bharat, having heard Gudaakesha address him, Hrishikesha positioned his magnificent chariot between the two armies. In front of Bheeshma, Drona and the other kings, he said "O Paartha, behold all the Kuru warriors gathered here".

Shri Krishna obeyed Arjuna's instructions, like any devoted charioteer should, and positioned their chariot in the middle of the Kaurava and Paandava armies. But he chose an interesting location, he positioned it right where Arjuna could see his fondest relatives, friends and well wishers on the Kaurava side. So now, Arjuna was face to face with the people he had love and respect for, including Bheeshma and Drona.

This verse contains the first words spoken by Shri Krishna in the Gita, and reflect his wise and clever personality. Instead of referring to the Kauravas as "sons of Dhritraashtra" as Arjuna and Sanjaya did, he refers to them as "Kurus". This was an interesting choice, because both Kauravas and Paandavas are part of the Kuru dynasty. So Shri Krishna was pointing out the similarity between the two armies rather than their differences.

In addition, Shri Krishna wanted to use this opportunity to create the conditions in which he would deliver the teaching of the Gita. He knew that Arjuna's puffed up ego and battle spirit would be challenged by bringing him face to face with warriors like Bheeshma and Drona, who were not just mighty and powerful, but were also people he cared a lot about.

evam-ukto : thus addressed

hrishikesho : conquerer of the senses - Shri Krishna

gudaakeshena : conquerer of sleep - Arjuna

bhaarata : descendant of Bharata - Dhritraashtra

senyorubhayormadhye : between the two armies

sthaapayitvaa : position

rath-uttamam: magnificent chariot

bheeshma-drona: Bheeshma and Drona

pramukhataha : in front of

sarveshaam : everyone

cha : and

maheekshitaam : kings

uvaacha : said

pashya : behold

etaan : all

samavetaan: assembled members

kurun : Kuru dynasty

iti : thus

Bhagavad Gita Verse 26, Chapter 1

*tatraapashyatsthitaanpaarthaha pitrinaatha pitaamahaan |
aachaaryaanmaatulaan bhraatrin putraan poutraan sakhimstathaa || 26 ||
shvasuraan suhradashchaiva senyorubhayorapi*

tatra : there
apashyat : could observe
sthitaan : situated
paarthaha : Arjuna
pitrin atha : fatherly elders and
pitaamahaan : grandfatherly elders
aachaaryaan : teachers
maatulaan : maternal uncles
bhraatrin : brothers
putraan : sons
poutraan : grandsons
sakhims tathaa : friends too
shvasuraan : fathers-in-law
suhradashcha-eva : and well-wishers
senyor-ubhayor-api : in both armies

There, Arjuna saw his fatherly and grandfatherly elders, teachers, uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, as well as friends, in-laws and well-wishers, present in both armies.

Before Shri Krishna had spoken, the Kaurava army seemed like one big sea of evil to Arjuna, ready to be destroyed. But after Arjuna heard those words, he began to spot some known faces in the Kaurava army. He saw Drona, Bheeshma, and all the other people he knew. Soon, he began to see familiar faces in both the Kaurava and Paandava armies.

This experience is not so far away from the real world. In fact, a similar situation could have been faced by soldiers in the India Pakistan war, where many soldiers may have had to fight their friends and relatives. Even if we never have to wage war, we may have faced a similar situation.

Imagine you are a student who is about to graduate from college. You have been shortlisted for a prestigious job that is also highly selective - there is just one student that will get recruited from your college. You prepare for this interview for several weeks. On the day of the interview, you are almost 100 pct sure that you will pass through the interview with flying colours. As you step into the waiting hall for the interview, you conduct a quick survey of the candidates that you will compete against. You find out that Miss X, someone who's always on top of the dean's list, and someone who you thought had already accepted another offer, is also waiting in the interview hall, looking sharp and confident.

What goes through your mind?

Bhagavad Gita Verse 27, Chapter 1

*taansameekshya sa kaunteyaha sarvaanbandhunavasthitaan |
kripayaa parayaavishto vishidannidamabraveet || 27 ||*

Seeing his kinsmen standing near him, Arjuna, son of Kunti, became overwhelmed with pity, and struck by despair, spoke this.

taan : those
sameekshya sa : seeing
sarvaanbandhuna : kinsmen
avasthitaan : standing
kripayaa : pity
avishto : filled with
vishidan : despair
idam : this
abraveet: spoke

Strong egos are mired in duality. Like bipolar person, a strong ego can go from one emotion to its exact opposite almost instantly. When Arjuna saw the caliber of warriors in the opposing army, his demeanour switched from courage to cowardice in a matter of seconds.

Why did this happen? When one is under the control of the ego rather than the rational intellect, one's emotional balance is extremely vulnerable. All it took to destabilize his balance was for Shri Krishna to highlight Arjuna's kinsmen in the army.

This verse also shows that no one is immune from the workings of the ego. Arjuna was a well-educated, committed warrior, in fact one of the best warriors on the planet. Even someone as tough as him lost his emotional balance so quickly.

Notes

1. An interesting simile is provided in the Jnyaneshwari for this verse. Just like a man forgets his old girlfriend after being infatuated with a new girl, Arjuna's warrior instincts were replaced with pity for his kinsmen, and cowardice for the war.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 28-30, Chapter 1**Arjuna uvaacha:*

jaatasya hi dhruvo mrityurdhruvam janma mritasya cha |
dhrishtvemaam svajanam krishna yuyutsam samupasthitam || 28 ||
seedanti mama gaatrani mukham cha parishushyati
vepathuscha shareere me romaharshascha jaayate || 29 ||
gaandeevam stransate hastatvakchaiva paridahyate
na cha shaknomyavasthaatuma bhramateeva cha me manaha || 30 ||

O Krishna, I see my kinsmen gathered here to fight. My limbs are weakening, and my mouth has completely dried up, my body is quivering and my hair is standing on end. My Gaandeeva bow is slipping from my hands, my skin is burning, I am unable to stand and cannot think clearly.

After his mind was thrown off balance, Arjuna experienced a full-scale panic attack. In these verses, Arjuna described his symptoms to Shri Krishna, beginning first with his physical symptoms and in later verses, his mental and emotional symptoms.

It is rare that one gets to see a blow-by-blow account of a nervous breakdown in a spiritual text. But as we have seen, the Gita is not just a spiritual text but also an extremely practical text.

The rest of the chapter will look at what statements Arjuna or any individual will make when undergoing a highly disturbed emotional state. Many commentaries do not give importance to these verses. However, I think they are instructive for a variety of reasons, the primary one being that when we undergo such disturbed emotional states, we lose the objectivity to see clearly what is happening to us and perhaps stay alert for such symptoms.

dhrishtva-mama : seeing my
svajanam : kinsmen
krishna : O Krishna
yuyutsam : wanting to fight
samupasthitam : gathered here
seedanti : weakening
mama : my
gaatrani : limbs
mukham cha : and mouth
parishushyati : completely dry
vepathuscha : quivering
shareere : body
me : my
romaharshascha : hair standing on end
jaayate : happening
gaandeevam : bow
stransate : slipping
hastak : from my hands
tvak cha paridahyate : skin is burning
na cha shaknomy : unable to
avasthaatuma : stand
bhramateeva : deluded
cha me manaha : my mind

Bhagavad Gita Verse 31, Chapter 1

*nimittaani cha pashyaami vipareetani keshava |
na cha shreyanepashyaami hatva svajanamaahave || 31 ||*

O Keshava, I see omens that are inauspicious. I also do not see the good in killing my kinsmen in battle

nimittaani : omens
cha : also
: see
vipareetani : negative
keshava : Krishna
: also not
shreya: good
anupashyaami : I see
hatva : kill
svajanam : kinsmen
aahave : in battle

When one's emotions are running unchecked, rationality goes out the window. That's when one starts talking or thinking about irrational things like superstition, which is what Arjuna was alluding to in this verse.

On the surface, one would attribute Arjuna's second statement in this verse to an outpouring of compassion towards his kinsmen. But, would an outpouring of compassion cause a panic attack? The true underlying emotion that caused the panic attack was fear. And what was Arjuna afraid of? Arjuna was accustomed to winning every war that he fought. When he saw the caliber of warriors in the Kaurava army, his ego felt extremely threatened that maybe this time it won't win. Here we see that Arjuna's ego was trying to deflect this fear by substituting compassion for the true emotion of fear.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 32, Chapter 1

*na kangshe vijayam krishna na cha rajyam sukhani cha |
kim no rajyena govinda kim bhogaujeervitena vaa || 32 ||*

na : neither
kangshe : I desire
vijayam : victory
krishna : Krishna
na cha : nor
rajyam : kingdom
sukhani : pleasures
kim : what
no : for us
rajyena : in the kingdom
govinda : Govinda
kim : what
bhogau : pleasure
jeervitena : living
vaa : and

O Krishna, neither do I desire victory, nor pleasures, nor the kingdom. Of what value is the kingdom, pleasure, or in life itself, O Govinda?

A search for "common symptoms of depression" on the web turns up the following information:

- 1) Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. A bleak outlook—nothing will ever get better and there's nothing you can do to improve your situation.
- 2) Loss of interest in daily activities. No interest in former hobbies, pastimes or social activities. You've lost your ability to feel joy and pleasure.
- 3) Appetite or weight changes. Significant weight loss or weight gain—A change of more than 5 pct of body weight in a month.
- 4) Sleep changes. Either insomnia, especially waking in the early hours of the morning, or oversleeping (also known as hypersomnia).
- 5) Anger or irritability. Feeling agitated, restless, or even violent. Your tolerance level is low, your temper short, and everything and everyone gets on your nerves.
- 6) Loss of energy. Feeling fatigued, sluggish, and physically drained. Your whole body may feel heavy, and even small tasks are exhausting or take longer to complete.
- 7) Self-loathing. Strong feelings of worthlessness or guilt. You harshly criticize yourself for perceived faults and mistakes.
- 8) Reckless behavior. You engage in escapist behavior such as substance abuse, compulsive gambling, reckless driving, or dangerous sports.
- 9) Concentration problems. Trouble focusing, making decisions, or

remembering things.

10)Unexplained aches and pains. An increase in physical complaints such as headaches, back pain, aching muscles, and stomach pain.

Arjuna was suffering from most of the symptoms from this list. He now was mired in deep, almost suicidal depression, especially because he was questioning the value of life itself.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 33, Chapter 1

yeshaamarthe kaankshitam no raajyam bhoogaha sukhani cha |
te imevasthanitaa yudhde praanaamstyaktvaa dhanaani cha || 33 ||

Those, for whose sake we seek kingdom, enjoyment and happiness, are present here in war, ready to give up their desire for life and wealth.

Those, for whose sake we seek kingdom, enjoyment and happiness, are present here in war, ready to give up their desire for life and wealth.

yeshaam : those
arthe : for whose sake
kaankshitam : desire
naha : our
raajyam : kingdom
bhogaaha : enjoyment
sukhaani : happiness
cha : and
te : those
ime : their
asthanitaa : present here
yudhde : in the war
praanaam : their lives
tyaktvaa : given up
dhanaani : desire for wealth

Here Arjuna continues his fall into delusion by justifying why there is no point in living, or in carrying out the mission that he had committed to carry out. In his confused state, his mind mixed up his personal relationships with his mission-wise relationships.

In work, we are often asked to "not take things personally". Here we see an example of what happens when someone in war inserts personal aspects of his life into his work, resulting in complete confusion and breakdown of the mission.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 34-35, Chapter 1

*aachaaryaaha pitaraha putrosthataiva cha pitaamahaaha |
 maatulaaha shvashuraaha pautraaha shyaalyaaha sambandhinastathaa || 34
 ||
 etann hantumicchaami ghnatopi madhusoodana |
 api trailokyarajyasya hetoha kim nu mahikrute || 35 ||*

aachaaryaaha : teachers
 pitaraha : fathers
 putraha : sons
 tatha eva : like these
 cha: and
 pitaamahaaha : grandfather
 maatulaaha : uncles
 shvashuraaha : fathers-in-law
 pautraaha : grandsons
 shyaalyaaha : brothers-in-law
 sambandhinaha : relatives
 etann : these people
 hantum : kill
 ghnataha : attack
 madhusoodana : O Madhusoodana
 api : also
 trailokyarajyasya : three worlds
 hetoha : obtain
 nu : then
 mahikrute : for this earth

Teachers, uncles, fathers, sons, as well as grand-uncles, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, brothers-in-law and other relatives are here. Although they would like to kill me, I don't want to attack them, O Madhusoodana. When I won't do so even if it would win me all the three worlds, what to speak of winning just this earth?

We notice here that Arjuna essentially repeated his argument that he does not want to attack anyone in this war, since anyone he attacks is bound to be either a friend or a relative. But why was he repeating his arguments? Note that in each verse, he addressed Shri Krishna directly, hoping to get some sort of support or endorsement from him. But, Shri Krishna did not say one word, since he wanted to wait till Arjuna's delusionary outburst ended.

In the second verse about not desiring victory in the three worlds, Arjuna tried to justify his retreat from fighting by wrapping his cowardice in a cloak of fake large-heartedness. The ego can sometimes be more cunning than any politician.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 36, Chapter 1

*nihatya dhaartaraashtraanaha ka preetihi syaajjanaardana |
paapmevaashrayedasmaan hatvaitaanaatatayinaha || 36 ||*

nihatya : kill
dhaartaraashtraan : relatives of dhri-
taraashtra
ka : what
preetihi : pleasure
syaat : derive
janaardana : O Janaardana
paapam : sin
eva : definitely
aashrayet : incur
asmaan : us
hatvaa : by killing
aatataayinaha : felons

What pleasure will we derive by killing these relatives of Dhritraashtra, O Janaardana? We will only incur sin by killing these felons.

As Arjuna built up a case in favour of not fighting the war, he added another point - that this endeavour will incur sin.

This is a critical point in understanding the message of the Gita. Let us examine what is meant by "sin" here. Since the word "sin" has several interpretations, let us first take something that we can define more precisely, which is the word "crime".

What is a crime? A crime is defined as an act conducted in opposition to a certain law enshrined in a country's legal system. So then, what is a sin? A sin is also defined as an act committed in opposition to a certain law. But what is that law? Who has written that law? Is that law defined by a certain religion? or by certain societal traditions? Which law did Arjuna use to come to the conclusion that his was about to commit a sin?

If Shri Krishna agreed that Arjuna's act was a sin, he would have said something. But as we see, Shri Krishna did not say anything even after hearing this statement.

All this boils down to a simple point: when faced with a situation in life, how should we act? As the Gita unfolds, we will get to the heart of this question.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 37, Chapter 1

*tasmaannarhaa vayam hantum dhaartaraashtraan svabaandhavaan |
svajanam hi katham hatvaa sukhinaha syaama maadhava || 37 ||*

Therefore, it is not appropriate for us to kill these relatives of Dhritraashtra who are also our brothers. How can we gain pleasure by killing our own, O Maadhava?

The word "tasmaat", which means therefore, indicates the conclusion of an argument. Here, Arjuna concluded his argument to Shri Krishna in which he asserted that that he did not want to fight. To defend that argument, Arjuna provided several points: that there was no point in the war or even in living itself, that the very people that he was fighting against were the same people that made him happy, that killing his kinsmen and his well-wishers was a sin, and that there would be no joy derived in doing so.

This argument was not built on any sort of rationality or logic because Arjuna came under the influence of "moha" or delusion, the delusion that personal relationships were more important in the battlefield than one's duty. An increase in moha usually suppresses our ability to discern between what is correct and what is not. This discerning ability is called "viveka".

Here's an real world example that illustrates moha and viveka. Imagine that your brother has a drinking problem, and needs to hear from you that the addiction needs to stop. What is the right thing for you to do? It is a difficult situation because your moha and viveka come into conflict. Viveka tells you that the right thing for you to do is to intervene, but moha tells you that doing so will endanger your relationship.

Another common example is that a surgeon will usually not perform an operation on a relative exactly because of this moha.

tasmaat : therefore
na arhaaha : not appropriate
vayam : we
hantum : to kill
dhaartarashtaan : relatives of Dhritraashtra
svabaandhavaan : our brothers
svajanam : our kinsmen
hi : because
katham : how
hatvaa : kill
sukhinaha : happiness
maadhava : O Maadhava

Notes

1. Viveka is the first step in the "Saadhana Chatushthaya", the 4-fold qualifications that are required for anyone treading on the spiritual path. Barring a few exceptions if you do not cultivate the ability to discern what is correct and what is not, your spiritual journey will never commence.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 38-39, Chapter 1

*yadyapyete na pashyanti lobhopahatchetasaha |
 kulakshayakritam dosham mitradrohe cha paatakam || 38 ||
 katham na gneyamasmaabhihi paapaadasmaannivartitum |
 kulakshayakritam dosham prapashyadbhirjanaardana || 39 ||*

If their greed-afflicted minds cannot see the error in annihilating society, and the sin of quarreling with their friends; why shouldn't we, who correctly perceive this error, refrain from committing this sin, O Janaardana?

Arjuna now began a second argument in which he began enumerating the flaws of the opposing army. He wanted to point out that his moral judgement was superior relative to the opposing army's position. This current sequence of verses is a classic example of how a seemingly logical argument is completely illogical because it has sprung from erroneous foundations. Moreover, Arjuna echoes the human tendency to point out flaws in others when the flaw lies in the pointer.

Illogical as it may be, Arjuna's comment lets us explore a force similar to moha, that of "lobha" or the desire to accumulate something. An increase in lobha for an object, person, situation or circumstance tends to suppress our viveka, our discerning ability. A politician that has extreme greed for a ministerial position could resort to illegal and unethical means to get it. Recent events in global financial markets are a good example where bankers were willing to defraud investors by selling them subprime loans, simply due to greed.

Both moha and lobha have one thing in common, they seemingly result in pleasure. For example, in case of moha, extreme attachment one's son or one's spouse gives one pleasure. In case of lobha, the desire to accumulate wealth or power gives one pleasure. But in both cases, the pleasure that one obtains is temporary and fleeting. In addition, one tends to cling to the object gained by lobha or moha for fear of losing it.

So what attitude should we have towards people or things we care about? The Gita delves into this topic in great detail.

yadyapi : if
 ete : they
 na pashyanti : cannot see
 lobhaha-upahat-chetasaha : minds
 afflicted by greed
 kula-kshaya-kritam : act of annihilating
 society
 dosham : error
 mitra-drohe : quarreling against friends
 cha : and
 paatakam : sin
 katham : why
 na gneyam : not know
 asmaabhihi : by us
 paapat : sin
 asmaat : this
 nivartitum : refrain
 prapashyadbhihi : right understanding
 janaardana : O Janardana

Bhagavad Gita Verse 40, Chapter 1

*kulakshaye pranashyanti kuladharmaha sanaatanaaha |
dharme nashte kulam kritstramadharmobhibhavatyuta || 40 ||*

As society gets destroyed, its timeless laws and traditions erode. Once that happens, lawlessness begins to dominate the entire society.

kula-kshaye : destruction of society
pranashyanti : gets destroyed
kula-dharmaaha : societal laws
sanaatanaaha : timeless
dharme : rules
nashte : after getting destroyed
kulam : society
kritstram : total
adharmaha : lawless
abhibhavati : dominates

We are nearing the end of the first chapter, and have just begun examining the last set of verses.

Here, Arjuna's deluded mind began to spin out of control, and the scale of his delusion became progressively magnified. He began enumerating how the act of warfare between the two warring factions will ultimately result in the destruction of civilization.

Infighting has caused the downfall of empires and civilizations, the most notable example being the Roman empire. When the upholders of the law, namely the statesmen and the warriors, fight among themselves, a breakdown of law and order takes place.

But here, Arjuna looked only at the worst case scenario, totally ignoring the possibility that the war could result in restoration of peace, order and prosperity to the kingdom. His mind had begun a downward slide of negativity that only became worse as he spoke more.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 41, Chapter 1

*adharmābhibhavaatkṛṣṇa pradushyanti kulāstriyāḥ |
 streeṣhu duṣṭāsu vārṣhaneya jāyate varṇasamkāraḥ || 41 ||*

When lawlessness dominates, it deteriorates the condition of women in society, O Krishna. Deterioration of women, O Vaarshneya, gives rise to contamination of character.

* *

adharmābhibhavaat : when lawlessness dominates
 kṛṣṇa : O Krishna
 pradushyanti : deterioration
 kulāstriyāḥ : women in society
 streeṣhu : women
 duṣṭāsu : deteriorated
 vārṣhaneya : O Vaarshneya
 jāyate : arises
 varṇa-samkāra : contamination of character

When lawlessness dominates, it deteriorates the condition of women in society, O Krishna. Deterioration of women, O Vaarshneya, gives rise to contamination of character.

Arjuna's rambling apocalyptic post-war imagination continues. He echoes a fear that most warriors have in the back of the mind when they go to war. Invading armies seldom show respect and dignity to the women of the defeated kingdom, they are usually treated as the spoils of the war. History has proven this out, and unfortunately it is still the case wherever there is the aftermath of war.

In any society, due to the law of averages, there always will be a part of the population with questionable morals and character. However, in a post-war situation where women are treated without dignity, and have to succumb to their invaders, there is no guarantee that they will be able to raise their children with the right values, education and morals. This results in a breakdown in character in the younger generation across the board. Arjuna downward-spiraling mind feared this scenario.

Notes

1. The Sanskrit word "varṇa" has several meanings. One traditional meaning of the word "varṇa" is caste, and if this meaning is taken, the second verse means "this gives rise to contamination of castes". However, since we cannot even begin to imagine what the caste system looked like in the age when the Gita was written, I have used a more abstract meaning of the word "varṇa".

Bhagavad Gita Verse 42-43, Chapter 1

*samkaro narakaayeiva kulaghnaanaam kulasya cha |
 patanti pitaro hyeshaam luptapindodakakriyaahaa || 42 ||
 doshairetai kulaghnaanaam varnasamkarakaarakaihai |
 utsaadyante jaatidharmaaha kuladharmashcha shaashvataahaa || 43 ||*

Contamination of character pushes the annihilators of society and society itself into hell; their ancestors fall from grace, having been deprived of their offerings of Pinda and water. Timeless societal and humanitarian values and traditions are destroyed by the contamination of character created by these annihilators of society.

In Indian culture, one's ancestors and family lineage are given great importance. In these verses, Arjuna expressed his worry that the deterioration of post-war society would result in loss of respect for the ancestors who created the laws and values of that society.

It is not that difficult to draw a parallel between the reverence for the ancestors of a society expressed here, and the reverence for the builders of any institution in the modern world. During every independence day celebration of a country, freedom fighters' contributions are remembered and revered. Similarly, if you walk the hallways of any modern corporation, you will usually see the founders' portraits displayed prominently. Someone who cares deeply about one's country, or about one's place of work, will never look forward to the denigration of the founders. Arjuna, even in his deluded state, cared about the builders of the Kuru dynasty.

samkara : contamination of character
 narakaaya : takes to hell
 eva : certainly
 kula-ghnaanaam : annihilators of society
 kulasya : society
 cha : and
 patanti : falls
 pitara : ancestors
 eshaam : due to these killers
 doshai : errors
 etai : these
 kulaghnaanaam : annihilators of society
 varna-samkara-kaarakaihi : causing confusion of character
 utsaadyante : get destroyed
 jaati-dharmaaha : humanitarian values
 kula-dharmaaha : societal values
 cha : and
 shaashvataaha : timeless

Notes

1. "Pinda" is a ball of rice offered to the memory of one's ancestors during certain Indian rituals

Bhagavad Gita Verse 44-45, Chapter 1

utsannakuladharmaanam manushyaanam janaardana |
narakeniyatam vaaso bhavatityanushushruma || 44 ||
aho bata mahatpaapam kartum vyavasitaa vayam |
yadryaadjyasukhalobhena hantum svajanamudyataaha || 45 ||

People whose societal values have eroded, O Janaardana, reside in hell indefinitely, this I have heard. Alas! It's unfortunate that we have decided to undertake this extreme sin. Our greed towards the pleasures of the kingdom has prepared us to kill our kinsmen.

Here, Arjuna concluded an argument that he had begun a few verses prior. According to him, a rise in lawlessness began a chain reaction which caused the entire civilization, not just the warmongers, to end up residing in hell indefinitely.

Let's summarize this argument. What Arjuna is saying, in simple words, is that the Kaurava army is committing the sin of destroying the Kuru clan. Since he can see that it is a sin, he will not join them in this act, and therefore not fight.

Again, we see moha at work here. Duryodhana had moha for the Kauravas, whereas Arjuna had moha for the entire Kuru dynasty. Even though Arjuna was more large-hearted than Duryodhana in his moha, moha clouded his judgement the same way it clouded Duryodhana's judgement.

Moreover, in verse 45, Arjuna's demonstrates classic "victim" mindset where one cannot see oneself in control of a situation, by using words such as "alas", "it is unfortunate". His moha took over his mind so completely that one of the world's foremost warriors spoke words that a weakling would use.

kula-dharmaanaam : societal values
 manushyaanaam : those people
 janaardana : O Janaardana
 narake : hell
 aniyatam : indefinitely
 vaaso : reside
 bhavati : happens
 iti : this
 anushushruma : I have heard
 aho : Alas
 mahat-paapam : extreme sin
 kartum : undertake
 vyavasitaa : decided to do
 vayam : we
 yat : that
 raajyasukha : pleasures of kingdom
 lobhena : greed
 hantum : kill
 svajanam : our kin
 udyataaha : are prepared

Bhagavad Gita Verse 46, Chapter 1

*yadi maamaprateekaaramashastram shasktrapaanayaha |
dhaartaraashtraa rane hanyustanme kshemataram bhavet || 46 ||*

Even if I, unarmed and non-resistant, am killed in war by the sons of Dhritraasthra, who are armed with weapons, this will be beneficial for me.

This is the final statement uttered by Arjuna in the first chapter of the Gita. It shows the extent of delusion in Arjuna's mind, as he morphed from a mighty warrior into a pathetic, weak, helpless individual. Arjuna was desperately looking to escape the difficult situation he found himself in, and so his mind came up with all kinds of arguments to justify this escape, including making the escape "beneficial".

Let us revisit our friend Mr. X. He has been laid off due to the recession, and has been out of work for 3 months. He has not interviewed in over 2 weeks now. As time goes by, his confidence begins to weaken. If his mind cannot maintain equanimity, it will lead him down a path similar to Arjuna's fall. He begins to think that there's no point in applying for more jobs since there aren't any, and even if he gets an interview call, he has to compete with more qualified candidates. Therefore, there's no point even trying. In fact, it's better to stay at home and do nothing because there's no point applying for a job in a bad economy. Just look at how his mind has generated perverse logic to preserve the ego.

There's another point to note here : Shri Krishna kept quiet throughout Arjuna's rant. He wanted Arjuna to expel every perverse argument out of his system, in preparation for the teaching of the Gita.

yadi : even if
maama : I
aprateekaaram : non-resistant
ashastram : unarmed
shastra : weapons
paaneyaha : in hand
dhaartaraashtraa : sons of Dhritaraashtra
rane : in war
hanyuh : kill
tat : that
me : for me
kshemataram : beneficial
bhavet : will be

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 47, Chapter 1**Sanjaya uvaacha:**evamuktaarjunaha samkhye rathopastha upaavishat |**visrujya sasharam chaapam shokasamvignamaanasaha || 47 ||*

evam : thus
 uktva : having said
 arjunaha : Arjun
 samkhye : on the battlefield
 rath : chariot
 upasthaha : centre
 upaavishat : sat
 visrujya : cast out
 sasharam : with arrows
 chaapam : and bow
 shoka : sorrow
 samvignam : disturbed
 maanasaha : mind

Having said these words in the battlefield, Arjun sat in the center of his chariot, casting off his weapons, his mind disturbed with sorrow.

Arjuna ended his rant in this verse, which is the final verse in Chapter 1. His body language reflects his state of mind as he threw away his weapons and sat down on his chariot, in the midst of the battlefield. Sanjay the narrator took over here, and possibly gave a glimmer of hope to Dhritraashtra, who was hoping that this action of Arjuna could end the war even before it began.

Let us reflect upon the first chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, in preparation for the second chapter. Arjuna, ready for war, under the influence of his ego and mind, became weak when Shri Krishna moved the chariot in between the Paandava and Kaurava armies.

Now, we may never face a war in our lifetime, but we will undoubtedly face conflicts in life where we lose our mental equipoise, and need guidance on what the right course of action is. Death of a loved one, hard economic conditions, issues with family members or friends, a bad boss, a stressful job - life is full of conflict-ridden situations.

This chapter is called "Arjuna Vishaada Yoga", or the Yoga of Arjuna's dejection. We will delve deeper into the meaning of the word Yoga later, but for now, let's assume that it means technique or method that shows how one should conduct oneself in a life situation.

So why is Arjuna's dejection called a technique or a method? Let's take an example. Assume you own a car, and ever since you owned the car for about 10 years or so. You have never had an accident, and you never had the need to get a car insurance policy. But one fine day, you drive into your neighbour's car, and end up owing him a gigantic sum of money. From that day onwards, you will never ever drive a car without insurance. So, what this means is that you had to pass through an extremely difficult situation in order to gain the knowledge that insurance is important.

Similarly, Arjuna had to pass through an extremely difficult life situation which jolted him so much that it made him realize that he was missing something essential. He did not know how to conduct himself in such a difficult situation. Fortunately for him, Shri Krishna was right there to provide him that instruction. But without passing through that tough life situation, he never would have realized the need for such an instruction. Therefore, just like any other chapter in the Gita, this chapter is also a Yoga, or a method, of how to conduct one's life correctly.

om tatsatiti shreematbhagavatgitasupanishadsu brahmavidyaayaam yogashaastre shreekrishnaarjunsamvade arjunavishaadayogo naama prathamodhyaayaha || 1 ||



Saankhya Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 2**Sanjaya uvaacha:**tam tathaa kripayaavishtamashrupoornaakulekshanam |
vishidantamidam vaakyamuvaacha madhusoodanaha || 1 ||*

tathaa : that
 kripayaa : pity
 aavishtam : possessed
 ashru-poorna : tear-filled
 aakula : confused
 ikshanam : eyes
 vishidantam : grief-stricken
 vaakyam : words
 uvaacha : spoke
 madhusoodanaha : Madhusoodana

To him who was possessed with grief and pity, and having tear-filled, confused eyes, Madhusoodana spoke these words.

Sanjaya opens this chapter painting a vivid portrait of Arjuna's state: the world's mightiest warrior struck by grief and actually crying. The poetic phrase "confused eyes" probably alludes to Arjuna not being able to see right from wrong i.e. his viveka was suppressed.

Moreover, this state has affected Arjuna's entire personality - physically because he had tears, emotionally because he was struck with grief and pity, and intellectually because he was confused about what to do and what not to do.

Shri Krishna is referred again here as Madhusoodana. This name can be interpreted a couple of ways. In the Puraanas, Lord Vishnu assumed the form of Hayagriva to kill the demon Madhu, hence he is known as Madhusoodana. This means that Sanjaya, through his divine vision, knew that Shri Krishna was connected to Lord Vishnu. Another interpretation of the name Madhusoodana is one who slays honey. Honey is a metaphor for the ego, which can be extremely sweet for someone who does not know all the nefarious things that it is capable of.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 2**Shri Bhagavaan uvaacha:**kutastvaa kashmalamidam vishame samupasthitam |
anaaryajusthamasvargyamakeertikaramarjuna || 2 ||*

kutaha : from where
 tvaa : you
 idam : this
 vishame : inconvenient time
 samupasthitam: arisen
 anaarya : non-noble
 justham : accept
 asvargyam : non-heavenly
 akeertikaram : non-valourous
 arjuna : Arjuna

Shri Bhagavaan said: From where has this weakness arisen, at this inconvenient time? It is not noble, nor will it get you to heaven, not will it earn you valour, O Arjuna.

So finally we get to hear Shri Krishna speak in the Gita. But what he said was not what Arjuna expected at all.

Let's look at the kind of words Shri Krishna used. They were not words of kindness. They were not words of sympathy or support. They were tough, provocative words meant to shake Arjuna out of his deluded state of mind. They were intended to inform Arjuna that his assessment of this situation, and his plan of exiting from the situation, were totally incorrect and invalid.

Moreover, rule number one in communication skills training is "tailor the message to the audience". We see that here. Arjuna is a tough warrior, and tough talk is the only language he understands. An analogy would be a coach providing directions to a player in the middle of a football game. He would use tough talk, not sympathetic talk.

Shri Krishna also highlights another point here, that the timing of Arjuna's fall into sorrow is not appropriate. If he did want to express any emotion towards his kinsmen, he had a lot of time to do so prior to the battle. Once in battle, this behaviour was unwarranted.

Notes

1. In the rest of the Gita, Shri Krishna is addressed as "Bhagavaan". Bhagavaan means the one who is endowed with "bhagas" or divine attributes: wealth, virtue, glory, might, knowledge and dispassion.
2. The second verse is one long word composed of several shorter words. In Sanskrit, words are joined together using a system of rules called "sandhi". It is not necessary to learn the sandhi rules since most commentaries dissect long words into their components. We are fortunate to leverage their efforts here.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 2

*klaibyam maa sma gamah paartha naitattvayupapadyate |
kshudram hridayadaurbalyam tyaktvotishtha parantapa || 3 ||*

Don't yield to this effeminate behaviour, O Paartha, it is not worthy of you. Cast off this petty weakness of heart and arise, O scorcher of foes!

klaibyam : effeminate
maa sma gamah : do not yield
paartha : O son of Prithaa
etat: this
tvavi : in you
na : not
upapadyate : not worthy
kshudram : petty
hridaya: heart
daurbalyam : weakness
tyaktva : cast off
uttishtha : arise
paran-tapa : O scorcher of foes

Shri Krishna, an expert motivational speaker, used a "carrot and stick" approach towards Arjuna here. Let's first look at the stick or negative aspect, followed by the carrot or positive aspect.

One of the worst things you can call a warrior is effeminate. Even young boys playing sports will get upset when someone says 'Hey! You throw the ball like a girl!'. So imagine how Arjuna felt when Shri Krishna called him effeminate. Moreover, using the adjective weak-hearted to describe Arjuna was another jolt to the usually courageous and lion-hearted warrior.

But Shri Krishna also appealed to Arjuna's better qualities. By addressing him as "Paartha", he reminded Arjuna of his esteemed and respected mother Prithaa (Kunti), and how she would feel if Arjuna shirked away from war. Shri Krishna also reminded Arjuna of his battle prowess, that he was called a "scorcher of foes".

The final point in this shloka is the powerful Sanskrit word "utthishta", meaning arise, which evokes Swami Vivekananda's famous statement "Arise! Awake! and stop not till the goal is reached!'. Arjuna is instructed not just to arise physically, but also to lift his mind from the depths of delusion to a higher plane of intelligence.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 2**Arjuna uvaacha:**katham bheeshmamaham sankhye dronam cha madhusoodana |
ishubhihi prati yotsyami poojaarhaavarisoodana || 4 ||*

katham : how
 bheeshmam : Bheeshma
 aham : I
 sankhye : in battle
 dronam : Drona
 cha : and
 madhusoodana : O Madhusoodana
 ishubhihi : with arrows
 prati : with
 yotsyami : fight
 poojaahow : worthy of worship
 ari-soodana : O Arisoodana

How can I, O Madhusoodana, fight against Bheeshma and Drona with arrows? Both of them are worthy of worship, O Arisoodhana!

Shri Krishna's words jolted Arjuna out of his panic attack and brought him to a state where he was ready to have a conversation. Since Arjuna's arguments from the previous chapter remained unanswered, hence he continued to insist on relinquishing the war.

Arjuna uses the words "slayer of the demon Madhu" and "slayer of foes" to address Shri Krishna, hinting that it is easy to slay evil individuals but difficult to slay one's kinsmen. The fundamental problem still remained unsolved, which is that Arjuna was still holding on to the familial and teacher-student relationships in the context of a battlefield. But on the Kaurava side, Bheeshma and Drona viewed Arjuna as an enemy and not as a student or a family member. They were not under any delusion like Arjuna was.

Can we relate this to an example from our lives? Think of a father and mother who have brought up their children, and like any responsible parents, guided them as to what was right and what was wrong. When the children grow into adults, they now possess the ability to think for themselves, and on occasion will consult their parents on decisions that they need help with.

But, similar to Arjuna's attachment to his elders, if the parents still hold on to the relationship that existed when their children were young, the children would not consider that to be appropriate behaviour and then this could impact the relationship with their parents.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 2

guroonahatvaa hi mahaanubhaavaan shreyo bhoktum bhaikshyamapeeha loke
 |
hatvaarthakaamaamstu guroonohaiva bhunjeeya bhoogaanrudhirapradigdhaan
 || 5 ||

I will not kill my revered teachers, because in this world, I would prefer to partake of food received through alms, rather than enjoy the blood-stained worldly pleasures derived from killing my teachers.

guroon : teacher
 ahatvaa : not kill
 hi : because
 shreyaha : better
 bhoktum : partake
 bhaikshyam : donated food
 api : even
 iha : this
 loke : world
 hatvaa: kill
 artha-kaamaan : worldly pleasures
 tu : then
 eva : only
 bhunjeeya : partake
 bhoogaan : enjoyments
 rudhira-pradigdhaan : blood-stained

This verse and the next few verses may seem similar to the ones we saw in the last chapter, but upon closer inspection, there are subtle differences. Arjuna's panic attack has ended, and his emotional state has become somewhat normal. The change in Arjuna's attitude is also indicated by the change in meter - we notice that this shloka, and some of the forthcoming shlokas, have a longer meter.

What remains, though, is a tinge of the victim attitude, indicated in the statement that he would prefer begging to hurting his teachers. But what is positive here is that Arjuna is slowly opening up to logical reasoning, since he is no longer under the influence of the panic attack, and his agitations have subsided.

The lesson here is that we cannot have a sane conversation with someone in a charged emotional state, their mind has to calm down somewhat in order to create room for logic.

In this shloka, Arjuna is still holding on to the position that he will definitely not kill his kinsmen. But as his emotional state calms down, we shall see him begin to question that position.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 6, Chapter 2

*na chaitvidmaha kataranno gareeyo
yadvaa jayeema yadi vaa no jayeyuhu |
yaaneva hatvaa na jiveevishaamstevasthitaaha
pramukhe dhaartaraashtraaha || 6 ||*

To conquer them, or to be conquered by them, I do not know which is the better of the two. Dhritraashtra's kinsmen, after killing whom we certainly don't wish to live, stand here before us.

na cha : do not
vidmaha : know
naha : for us
katarat : of two which is
gareeyaha : better
te yat-vaa : whether
jayem : conquer them
yadi-vaa : or
naha : we
jayeyuhu: they conquer us
yaan : whom
eva : certainly
hatvaa : by killing
eva : certainly
asthitaaha : standing here
pramukhe : opposite us

dhaartaraashtraaha : Dhritaraashtra's kinsmen

Here we see Arjuna move away from the all-or-nothing position of "I will not fight". His hardline position morphed into a dilemma. And the dilemma was as follows: "Should I or should I not fight? I do not know which is correct." This question is the fundamental question that provoked the message of the Gita that we shall see very shortly.

We face questions like this all the time - this was alluded to in an earlier post. A boss may like an employee, but the business will tank if he does not fire the employee. Should he fire him or not? Questions like this arise all the time. Life is nothing but a series of actions driven by the day-to-day decisions we take.

Here's another important point. Arjuna's teachers and elders were revered and respected by him, they gave him pleasure, but here they were in front of him, ready to kill him. Similarly, behind every pleasure-filled person, experience or object we encounter in life lies its negative aspect. This is an interesting insight about life. It is rare to find people, experiences or objects that give us pleasure all of the time. Here's an example that resonates with us: a new house that was a source of joy in the beginning, will cause grief when one has to pay for its maintenance.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 2

*kaarpanyadoshopahatasvabhaavaha pricchaami
tvaam dharmasammoodhachetaaha |
yachchreyaha syaannishchitam broohi tanme
shishyasteham shaadhi maam tvaam prapannam || 7 ||*

This error of cowardice has damaged my personality, and my deluded intellect cannot decide what is right or wrong. Tell me what is definitely appropriate. Guide me, I am your disciple and take refuge in you.

This verse is a milestone in the Gita, because it reflects a change in Arjuna's thinking.

Arjuna finally gained enough of his reasoning capacity back to realize that his mind had been thrown off balance by cowardice, which he rightly labelled as an error. In the first chapter, he could never have come to this conclusion because he was experiencing an extremely negative emotional state. He was able to put a degree of objectivity towards his thinking, some space between his thoughts and himself. And in doing so, he realized that his intellect was totally deluded.

In addition, he also realized that because of this cowardice, he was in no position to make a decision about whether to fight or not. This was a high-stakes decision, a decision that could impact the course of history. He quickly needed to find some other way of coming to a decision. The only way he could do so is to give up any pretense of knowing what was the correct thing to do, and give that decision to a trusted friend and guide, Shri Krishna.

For many of us, especially in youth, we never feel the need to look beyond the material world. All our goals and aspirations are material, and once we achieve a certain goal, we strive for a higher goal. And as long as everything goes our way, we are fine. But sooner or later, something happens in our lives that shakes things up and makes us think whether we are missing something. We all have to pass through a earth-shattering stage in life that makes us question things, and makes us revisit our assumptions and beliefs. That stage was indicated in chapter 1 of the Gita, when Arjuna saw his entire world and belief system collapse.

kaarpanya : cowardly
dosho : error
upahata : damaged
svabhaavaha : inherent nature
pricchaami : I ask
tvaam : you
dharma : right and wrong
sammoodha : deluded
cheta : intellect
yat : what
shreyaha : appropriate
syaat : may be
nishchitam : definitely
broohi : tell me
tat : that
me : for me
shishyaha : disciple
shaadhi : guide
maam : me
tvaam : your
prapannam : refuge

When this shattering happens, we have two choices. We can continue operating in the material world in the same way as we did before. We can also use this collapse to search for something higher. The choice made by a seeker is indicated by the words "Tell me what is definitely appropriate. Guide me, I am your disciple and take refuge in you" uttered by Arjuna.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 2

na hi prapashyaami mamaapanudyaad yachchokamuchchoshanamindriyaanaam
|

avaapya bhoomaavasapatnamridham raajyam suraanaamapi chaadhipatyam
|| 8 ||

*Even if I should obtain prosperity and unrivalled kingship on earth, or even supremacy over the gods, I do not see that it will drive away this sorrow that withers my senses. *

na hi: do not
prapashyaami : I seemama : my
apanudyaat : drive away
yat : that which
shokam : sorrow
uchchoshanam : wither
indriyaanaam: senses
avaapya : obtain
bhoomau : on earth
asapatnam : unrivalled
ridham : prosperous
raajyam : kingdom
suraanaam : gods
api : even if
cha : and
aadhipatyam : supremacy

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Arjuna realized that the sorrow caused as a result of his attachment to his kinsmen was not ordinary. It burrowed deep into his personality and lodged itself in it. This deep rooted sorrow had the effect of totally throwing his senses off track. He was not able to see or hear clearly. This sorrow was not going to be easy to remove.

In this verse, Arjuna also came to the conclusion that what he was looking for could not be found in the material world. If this were the case, he would have been happy with wealth, riches and thrones. But here we see that even supremacy over the gods was something that would not satisfy him.

Arjuna reached a point where the only thing that mattered for him was the ultimate cure for sorrow, a cure that was permanent, and not some material thing like wealth that would diminish sorrow temporarily. And this ultimate cure that he was seeking was a higher level of discrimination or viveka

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*Bhagavad Gita Verse 9, Chapter 2**Sanjaya uvaacha:*

evamuktvaa hrishheekesham gudakeshaha parantapa |
na yotsya iti govindamuktvaa tushneem babhoova ha || 9 ||

evam : this
 uktvaa : having spoken
 parantapa : scorcher of foes
 na yotsya : I will not fight
 iti : this
 uktvaa : said
 tushneem : silent
 ha: and became

Sanjaya said: Having spoken this to Hrisheeksha, Gudaakesha, the scorcher of foes, said to Govinda : "I will not fight", and became silent.

In the last verse, Arjuna had surrendered his decision-making to Shri Krishna, and had asked him for guidance. Arjuna knew that he was in no shape to make that decision himself, let alone fight. So he eventually proclaimed that he would not fight, and became silent.

We should note that it was not just Arjuna's voice that became silent. His mind, though not totally silent, became calmer than what it was in the last verse. Otherwise, it could not have assimilated the teaching that was about to follow.

Also note that the narration has shifted back to Sanjaya in this verse, and the meter has changed back to normal. He refers to Arjuna as Gudaakesha or "conqueror of sleep", and Shri Krishna as Hrisheeksha or "conqueror of the senses".

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 2

*tamuvaacha hrisheekeshaha prahasanniva bhaarata |
senayorubhayormadhye visheedantamidam vachaha || 10 ||*

Hrishikeesha, as though smiling, spoke these words to the despondent Arjuna, in the middle of the two armies.

tam : to him
uvaacha : spoke
hrisheekeshaha : Hrisheekeshaha
prahasan iva : as though smiling
bhaarata : Arjuna
senayor-ubhayor-madhye : in the
middle of the armies
visheedantam : despondent
idam : these
vachaha : spoke words

The most interesting aspect of this verse is the phrase "as though smiling", and has been interpreted differently by several commentators. The commonly held notion is : Shri Krishna wanted to use Arjuna as a vehicle for delivering the sermon of the Gita, and he smiled because the time for delivering the sermon had come as soon as Arjuna requested him to become his disciple. Another interpretation is that on the one hand, Arjuna is surrendering to Shri Krishna and asking for guidance, but on the other hand he says that he will not fight. Therefore Shri Krishna is smiling on this qualified request from Arjuna.

Our journey so far was just the background of the Gita. Starting from the next verse, we are about to delve into the heart of the Gita. Like any good speaker, Shri Krishna has provided an overview of the Gita for us in Chapter 2. Later chapters will delve into these themes in significant detail.

We will try our best to understand some of the more abstract verses in this chapter, but let's not worry if we don't understand them completely in the first reading. These verses will reveal new nuances and facets in each reading.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 2**Shri Bhagavaan uvaacha:**ashochyaananvashochastvam pragnyaavaadaamshcha bhaashase |
gataasoonagataasoonshcha naanushochanti panditaaha || 11 ||*

ashochyaan : not worthy of sorrow
 anvashochaha : grieving
 tvam : you are
 pragnyaa : wisdom
 vaadaam : words
 cha : yet seemingly
 bhaashase : speak
 gataasoon : departed
 agataasoon : undeparted
 cha : and
 na : do not
 anushochanti : grieve
 panditaaha : wise people

Shri Bhagavaan said:You are grieving for those who are not worthy of sorrow, yet seemingly speaking words of wisdom. The wise grieve not for the departed, nor for those who have not yet departed.

In the verses so far, Arjuna thought he was wise in lamenting the war by making a plea for peace. But Shri Krishna here pointed out that Arjuna "seemingly spoke wise words", i.e. in reality what Arjuna said was not correct. His assessment of the situation was clouded by emotion instead of being driven by logic and reason. On one hand, he was displaying grief, on the other hand, he was trying to display logic. Logic and grief cannot go together.

There are several instances in life where what we thought was correct knowledge, no longer applies. For example, let's say you get promoted to your first managerial job. It is your first day at work and you get invited to 10 meetings from different teams. If you were at a job right out of college, you would ensure that you attended all the meetings that you were invited to, and doing so would be the right thing to do at that stage in your career. But as a manager, you have the advantage of seniority to choose which meetings to go to, and which to avoid. You no longer assess the situation like you previously used to. You use different reasoning and logic.

Shri Krishna's wanted to correct Arjuna's logic. He pointed to Arjuna that there was no need to grieve for the living nor for the dead. Death is inevitable. We should enjoy and appreciate the living, just like one appreciates a colourful soap bubble blown by a child. The bubble will last for a few seconds, but inevitably, it will burst. Some bubbles burst quickly, some last for a longer time. But there is never a surprise when a bubble eventually bursts.

Therefore Shri Krishna instructs Arjuna, and us, to assess any life situation with logic and reason, and not to get swayed by emotion. Of course, it will not always be possible to check our emotions, but it should be what we strive for constantly. We saw what happened to Arjuna when he let his emotions run wild, resulting in a panic at-

Notes

1. "Moha" is delusion is reverse thinking. Mistaking the real for the unreal, impermanent as permanent, something that was never ours as ours, is delusion. The first line of the shloka addresses moha.
2. "Shoka" or grief is excessive dwelling in the past, or in other words, reliving past memories repeatedly. The second line of the shloka addresses shoka.
3. Per Shankaracharya's commentary, shoka and moha were the two primary reasons that Arjuna resisted fighting against his relatives.

tack. A wise person who uses "viveka" or discrimination (logic and reasoning about correct and incorrect) is called a "pandit". He need not necessarily have formal degrees, but is one who uses reason all the time.

A bubble will eventually burst, and the body will eventually perish. But is that the end? The next verse goes deeper into this topic.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 2

*na tvevaaham jaatu naasam na tvam neme janaadhipaaha |
na chaiva na bhavishyaamaha sarve vayamataha param || 12 ||*

In fact, there was never a time when I did not exist, nor did you, nor did these kings; and never shall we all cease to exist hereafter.

The Gita uses a lot of poetic techniques, including using double negatives like the ones in this verse. If you cancel the double negatives, a simpler version of this verse will be "All of us are timeless and eternal. We always existed in the past, and we will always exist in the future".

This statement, at first glance, does not seem to make sense. So let's look at an example. Let's imagine a huge lake with deep waters. The surface of the lake is usually quiet. Once in a while, a wind blows across the lake causing a wave to appear for a few seconds, then disappear soon after.

If we apply the logic of this verse and examine it from the perspective of a wave, the lake always existed before the wave came into existence. And the lake will remain long after any wave has disappeared.

Similarly, an LCD television has thousands of pixels, or dots of light, on its screen. These pixels turn on and off, due to which a moving image is created on the screen. We can enjoy a movie on the screen that will begin and end, characters and situations will come and go, but the screen will remain as a constant.

Now, according to physics, matter can never be created or destroyed, it can only undergo change from one state to another. So therefore, this shloka reiterates this physical law by saying that the atoms and molecules that comprise us always existed in the universe in some shape or forms.

But, just like the surface of the lake is a constant that lets the play of waves happen on it, there is a timeless, eternal, constant surface or "essence" that is present in the entire universe, which is the backdrop on which the play of matter happens.

At this point, what is being spoken of here may seem abstract and somewhat hard to conceptualize, but it is similar to algebra where we

: in fact
na eva : certainly never
jaatu : any time
aham : I
na : did not
aasam : exist
na : nor
tvam : you
no : nor
ime : these
janaadhipaaha : kings
cha : and
na eva : certainly never
na : will not
bhavishyaamaha : exist
sarve : all
vayam : of us
ataha param : hereafter

Notes

1. The wave and lake example is from the Jnyaneshwari, which is filled with tons of examples to explain complex concepts such as this one.

denote unknown quantities by variables like x and y , till such time as we deduce the right value.

Ok. So what exactly is this eternal essence? How do we see it? If it is present in us, which part of the body does it reside in?

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 2

*dehinosminyathaa dehe kaumaram yauvanam jaraa |
tathaa dehaantarapraaptirdheerastatra na muhyati || 1*

Just as in this body, the body dweller passes through childhood, youth and old age, so also does it obtain another body (after death); the steadfast person does not grieve over this.

It is our experience that we pass through childhood, youth and old age. We can agree that this concept is familiar to us. But note the language used in the first line. It is not you or I that passes through these phases, it is something called the "dehina" or the "body dweller". The body is born, it undergoes changes, and eventually perishes. But the body dweller remains constant through these changes. So, this means that the body dweller is something that is separate, distinct and different from the body.

Remember the example of Mr. X and his car from the first verse? Let's revisit it. Mr. X is excited when his car is brand new. After 5-6 years, it starts to develop engine problems. After another 4-5 years, the problems have become so bad that Mr. X decides to sell this car and buy a new Mercedes S-class. Mr. X can be called a "car dweller".

As the old car's engine degraded over the years, Mr. X remained the same from the car's perspective. But when the car had lived its life, he discarded that car for another new car. And there was nothing to be sad about this point. An extreme scenario is some unscrupulous people deliberately crash their old car just so that they can get insurance money to buy a new one.

Similarly, our body undergoes modifications of birth and aging, and eventually perishes. But the body dweller remains constant through these modifications. When the old body has become unfit to dwell in, the body dweller discards it and obtains a new body. The key point here is that the body dweller remains constant through the changes in its body, and also through the change from one body to another. And just like in the car example, a wise person should not grieve about growing old or dying, because the body dweller will always remain constant.

The body dweller is, therefore, the eternal essence that was highlighted

dehinaha : body dweller
asmin : this
yathaa : just like
dehe : body
kaumaram : childhood
yauvanam : youth
jaraa : old age
tathaa : similarly
dehaaantara : another
praaptihi : obtain
dheeraha : steadfast person
tatra : by that
na muhyati : do not grieve

Notes

1. In one day we have several thoughts such as "I am happy", "I am sad", we join a condition to our "I". Each time do so, we are "born" as a happy person, as a sad person and so on, even if there is no new physical body that is born.

in the prior verse. And since it is different than the physical body which perishes, it cannot be "found" in any part of the physical body.

So what exactly is this body dweller, this eternal essence? And how should we acquire the wisdom to see this eternal essence?

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 2

*maatrasparshaastu kaunteya sheetoshmasukhaduhkadaaha |
aagamaapaayinoonityaastanstitikshasva bhaarata || 14 ||*

maatrasparshaaha : contact with
material objects
tu : only
kaunteya : Kaunteya
sheeta : cold
ushna : heat
sukha : joy
duhka : sorrow
daaha : give
aagama : appear
apaayina : disappear
taan : those
titikshasva : endure them bravely
bhaarata : O Bhaarata

Contact with material objects will only give joy and sorrow, heat and cold. These are transitory - they appear and disappear, so endure them bravely, O Bhaarata.

The last verse gave a hint of what is this thing called the eternal essence. But since none of us have ever seen it, or experienced it, we would now like to know how can we make that happen. This verse gives us a preparatory step in that regard. It advises us to develop the capability of titiksha, or brave endurance against joy and sorrow.

Let's examine each aspect of this verse. The first part of this verse makes the assertion that contact with material objects, or more specifically, contact of our senses with material objects, causes us to experience heat and cold.

How does this work? The senses react to external stimuli and send an input signal to the mind. The mind processes these sensory inputs and labels some as "joy" and some as "sorrow". A hot coffee when it is freezing weather outside gives us joy, for sure. But the same cup of hot coffee in boiling hot summer will probably not give us joy, in fact it would probably give us sorrow.

More broadly, heat and cold in this verse represent polar opposites of stimuli received by all of our sense organs. If we take the organ of sight, then heat and cold represent beauty and ugliness. If we take the organ of touch, then heat and cold represent soft and hard.

Taking this even further, we can include words as well. If someone praises us, our ego-centred mind gets a boost, and we experience pleasure at that point. But if someone insults us, or criticizes us, our ego-centered mind feels threatened and we experience sorrow at that point.

So to summarize, our sense organs and our ego can get affected by external stimuli. But, instead of labelling each external stimulus as joy or sorrow, what if we remained steady through each of them? Instead of labelling these stimuli as "joy" and "sorrow", could we begin to label them differently?

Let's say your boss gave you a mouthful of criticism after your sales presentation at work. His words came through your ears, the ears sent a signal to your mind, and the mind took this criticism and labelled it as "sorrowful" or "painful". Instead, what would happen if we labelled this as something neutral e.g. "useful information", and used it to improve our next presentation? And if the words were not really criticism, but were veiled or direct insults, what would happen if we labelled them as "irrelevant" or "noise" or "chatter"?

Now you may say, yes, that sounds good in theory, but how do we do it in practice? The second part of the verse gives a clue in this regard. It says that any contact with material objects is temporary, it will appear and then disappear, and it has a beginning and an end. Therefore, if we know that something has an end, why should we let it bother us? Or conversely, if we know that a pleasant situation has ended, if the child's bubble has burst, why should we grieve about it?

Again, you may say that developing this titiksha, this brave endurance, would still be difficult. Just like losing weight is not something that happens overnight, developing titiksha will also not happen overnight. You need to follow a structured, disciplined technique to do so, and the Gita will go into this topic in depth.

So then, what is the benefit of developing this titiksha? We shall see very soon.

Notes

1. Heat, cold, joy, sorrow etc. are termed as "Vikaara". Vikaara means a temporary modification of some thing or some substance that is permanent.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 2

*yam hi na vyathayantyete purusham purusharshabha |
samaduhkhasukham dheeram somrutatvaaya kalpate || 15 ||*

Therefore, that person who is not agitated by these (contacts with material objects), O strongest of men, and can remain balanced in joy and sorrow; that wise person is fit for immortality.

Most people who read this verse immediately zero in on the last part and quickly ask the question "will this mean that if I follow the teaching in this verse, I will never die?". Immortality here does not refer to a state where our body never perishes, or a state where we go to heaven and enjoy its delights forever.

What is meant here is that life is a series of experiences that arise, exist temporarily, and perish. The person who knows the "trick" of staying balanced through these experiences will attain a state where they will transcend the push and pull of these experiences, and will eventually get to touch that changeless, eternal essence that came up in the earlier verses. One who does not get affected by agitation is called "dheera".

So how do we bring this down to our daily lives? Let's first look at a simple question. Why do someone else's agitations do not impact us? Because we do not associate our "I" with someone else's agitations. Similarly, our "I" is also not associated with our body/mind/intellect related agitations and conditions. If there is a fragrance in the room, we do not say "I am fragrant". Therefore, we should strive to keep the joyful or sorrowful condition from associating with the "I". Instead of saying "I am sad", we can say, "there is sadness".

Furthermore, we have seen instances where people are ready to endure pain and sorrow when they attach themselves to a higher ideal. A parent will endure a lot of suffering so that he or she can educate the child. A freedom fighter will endure torture, or even die for the cause of the country's freedom. This verse is asking us to become wise and aim for the highest possible ideal, that of the eternal essence.

We have been repeatedly hearing about the eternal essence in these verses. Can we get a deeper understanding?

yam : that
hi : therefore
na : not
vyathayanti : agitated
yete : these
purusham : person
purusharshabha : O strongest among men
samaduhkhasukham : balanced in joy and sorrow
dheeram : wise person
saha : that
amrutatvaaya : immortality
kalpate : fit for

Notes

1. The examples in this post are from Swami Chinmayananda's commentary on the Gita
2. The word "sama" contains the word "maa" meaning mother. The mother's loving attitude towards her child is same regardless of how the child behaves or misbehaves. Her attitude is "sama" or even-keel.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 2

*naasato vidyate bhaavo naabhaavo vidyate sataha |
ubhayoropi drishtontastvanayostattvadarshibhihi || 16 ||*

The unreal has no existence, and there is no non-existence of the real; the truth about both of these has been experienced by seers of the essence.

Here we encounter one of the most profound shlokas of the Gita, with layers and layers of meaning. It begins to lead us into understanding this thing called the eternal essence, and how we can experience it. At present, we may not have the capability to go too deep into it, but we can try to get its gist.

The best example I heard in connection with this verse is the animal cookie example. We may have come across animal cookies. They are a brand of children's cookies shaped like tigers, elephant etc. Now, some children will only want to eat the tiger shaped cookie and not the others, whereas other children may only want to eat the elephant shaped ones and not the others. But, most adults would not care about the shape of the cookie, they will eat any shape.

Why is this so? The adult has the wisdom to go straight to the essence of the cookie. He or she does not care about the name or the form taken by the cookie. And this wisdom has come by maturity, by knowing that the animals were "un-real" and they did not have "existence". Only the cookie dough was "real", just like this verse indicates.

Another example is about the newly married wife who has just received a beautiful gold bangle from her husband. Although she cares about the shape and ornamentation of the bangle, a pawn shop owner would not really care about those things. He only cares about the weight of the bangle.

The prior verse indicated that a wise person is one who stays balanced in joy and sorrow. This verse explains that the balanced person will slowly achieve wisdom and reach a state where any object or situation will begin to lose its "real-ness". Only the eternal essence will remain as the common element behind every object or situation. This vision is called "tattva-drishhti" or "vision of the essence".

asataha : unreal
bhaavaha : existence
vidyate : situation
na : no
tu : and
sataha : real
abhaavaha : non-existence
tattva : truth
darshibhihi : seers of
anayoha : of these two
ubhayoha : both
api : also
antaha : essence
drishtontaha : experienced

Notes

1. The Jnyaneshwari has several examples to illustrate this verse, for further reference.

Moreover, the word "bhaava" has another meaning: finitude. So it means that the real is infinite, and the unreal is finite. Therefore, the wise person does not go on chasing material objects that have a finite existence and give only finite happiness.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 2

*avinaashi tu tadviddhi yena sarvamidam tatam |
vinaashamavyayaasya na kashchitkartumarhati || 17 ||*

avinaashi : indestructible
tu : but
tat : that
viddhi : know
yena : which
sarvam : everything
idam : this
tatam : pervades
vinaasham : destruction
asya : of this
na : not
kashchit : any
kartum : do
arhati : is able

But know that (eternal essence) to be indestructible by which all this is pervaded. Nothing ever can destroy that, the imperishable.

The theme of the ongoing shlokas has been understanding the nature of the eternal essence. This verse gives us two qualities that the eternal essence possesses. Note that the sanskrit word "tat" meaning "that" refers to the eternal essence in this shloka.

Firstly, the eternal essence is imperishable. It cannot be destroyed, nor is it created. In the bangle example from the prior verse, the pawn shop owner only cared about the gold content of the bangle and not its shape and form. He could melt that bangle into another ornament, melt it again and make it into another ornament, and so on. In doing so, each subsequent ornament was "created" and "destroyed", but the gold essence was imperishable and indestructible. Similarly, the eternal essence spoken of in these verses is imperishable.

Secondly, the eternal essence pervades "all this", which means the eternal essence pervades the entire universe. If we immerse a piece of cloth into water, water pervades each and every fibre of the cloth. There is no part of the cloth that isn't dry. In the same way, from a rock, to plants, to animals, and to humans, the eternal essence pervades everything that is part of the universe.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 2

*antavanta ime dehaa nityasyoktaaha shareerinaha |
anaashinoprameyasya tasmaadyudhyasva bhaarata || 18 ||*

antavanta : perishable
ime : these
dehaa : bodies
nityasya : eternal
uktaaha : has been said
shareerinaha: this body-dweller
anaashinaha : imperishable
aprimeyasya : unfathomable
tasmaat : therefore
yudhyasva : fight
bhaarata : O Bhaarata

These bodies of the eternal body-dweller will perish, it is said. It is imperishable and unfathomable. Therefore, fight, O Bhaarata.

Like the previous shloka did, this shloka introduces another aspect of the eternal essence. It is unfathomable, incomprehensible. In other words, it cannot be understood by our intellect like we understand other kinds of knowledge. Also notice here that the eternal essence is denoted as one entity, whereas the bodies are many. Which means it is same eternal essence that pervades all material objects, including human bodies.

Since Shri Krishna concludes a line of reasoning in this shloka with the word "tasmaat", let's summarize the argument that began in verse 11 of this chapter:

- 1) Shri Krishna told Arjuna : "You are thinking that it is evil, wrong, unlawful to fight against your kinsmen. Your logic is incorrect. You are missing the big picture."
- 2) "I will tell you the correct logic. You shouldn't grieve for them. The eternal essence, body dweller, is imperishable and real, whereas human bodies and material objects are perishable, and are unreal, as it were."
- 3) "I will also give you some practical advice. Do not get agitated by joy and sorrow caused by contact with people, objects and situations. These are temporary conditions so bear them patiently. Once you learn to remain stable through joy and sorrow, you will begin to realize the eternal essence".
- 4) "Now that you know that you can never destroy the imperishable eternal essence, and that you should not grieve for the perishable, get up and fight, O Arjuna".

So then, what is the bottomline? "Arjuna, you should not think that you are this human body. Associate yourself with that body-dweller, that eternal essence. It will never get destroyed, so there is no need for

Notes

1. This shloka gives a pointer to the birth of the ego. When the eternal essence, which is one entity, associates itself with material objects, it gets split or fragmented. It begins to think that it is limited by whatever material object it is associated with. And when that eternal essence feels limited to a particular human body, and does everything in its power to maintain a sense of separation from everything else, that gives rise to the sense of ego.

grief."

Here we also see that Shri Krishna, like any good teacher, is providing 2 kinds of training : theoretical and practical. From the next shloka onwards, we will examine the theoretical, or logical aspect. In the later part of the chapter we will look at the practical aspect.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 2

*ya enam vetti hantaaram yachshainam manyate hatam |
ubhau tau na vijaanito naayam hanti na hanyate || 19 ||*

A person who believes that it (the eternal essence) slays, and another who believes that it is slain, neither of these understands. It does not slay, nor is it slain.

The "It" in this shloka and the following shlokas refers to the body-dweller. Here Shri Krishna addresses another concern that Arjuna had raised. Arjuna thought that that he will be held responsible for killing his kinsmen, which was something that was abhorrent to him. But Shri Krishna through this shloka advised him to use the logic or the perspective of the eternal essence. The eternal essence does not kill, nor does it die from someone else trying to kill it.

But how does this apply to us? We are not warriors, and it is rare that we will be put in the position of killing somebody. So there must be another interpretation. This shloka equates the act of slaying to performance of any action, and being slain to any change or modification. In other words, the eternal essence never performs any action, nor does it undergo any change or modification.

As an example, let's consider at the sun. Without the sun there will be no activity or life on this planet. There would be no plant life because plants use the sun's energy. There would be no animal or human life because both cannot survive without plants. But, does the sun perform any action pertaining to growing a plant or an animal? Does it get affected by all the changes happening on earth? It does not that that "I caused this forest to grow" or "I was impacted by this eclipse". It remains actionless and changeless.

The shloka goes on to say that one who thinks that the eternal essence acts or kills is not using viveka or discrimination, and that person does not have the correct understanding. The person is still thinking at the level of the material object, or in other words, the level of the un-real, and has still not learnt to discriminate between the two.

yaha : that person who
vetti : believes
hantaaram : slayer
yaha : that
cha : and
enam : this
manyate : believes
hatam: slain
ubhau : both
tau : those
na : do not
vijaanitaha : know
na ayam : this does not
hanti : slay
na hanyate : nor is slain

Notes

1. Verses 19 and 20 are almost verbatim taken from the Katha Upanishad.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 2

*na jaayate mriyate vaa kadaachinnaayam bhootvaa bhavita vaa na bhooyaha
|
ajo nityaha shaashvatoyam puraano na hanyate hanyamaane shareere || 20
||*

It (the eternal essence) is neither born, nor does it ever die; nor is it that having come into existence, it will again cease to exist. It is birthless, eternal, changeless and primeval, it is not slain when the body is killed

This shloka reinforces the attributes of the eternal essence that we have seen so far, that it is eternal and changeless. Any material object, including the human body, goes through six types of modifications: birth, exist, change, grow, decay, and to perish. The eternal essence is beyond all these modifications, hence it is changeless.

Two additional qualities of the eternal essence are provided here. The first is that it is birthless. It is logical that it should be birthless, otherwise it could not be eternal and timeless. And since it is birthless, it would have always existed, therefore it is primeval.

Note the change in meter to highlight the importance of this shloka.

na : not
jaayate : born
mriyate : dies
vaa : and
kadaachita : ever
na : not
ayam : this
bhootvaa : having come into existence
abhavita : ceases to be
vaa na : it is not the case that
bhooyaha : again
ajaha : birthless
nityaha : timeless
shaashvataha : changeless
puraano : primeval
na hanyate : slain
hanyamaane : when slain
shareere : the body

Notes

1. "Om namoji aadya" is the very first ovi or stanza of the Jnyaneshwari. Sant Jnyaneshwar invokes the primeval quality of the eternal essence by using the word "aadya" which means primeval.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 21, Chapter 2

*vedaavinaashinam nityam ya enamajamavyayam |
katham sa purushaha paartha kam ghaatayati hanti kam || 21 ||*

Whosoever knows this (eternal essence) to be imperishable, eternal, birthless and changeless, how can that individual, O Paartha, slay or cause anyone to be slain?

Imagine that you are operating a laptop that is connected to a printer. You open a document on the laptop and click the print button. The laptop sends a signal to the printer, and the document gets printed.

Now imagine that the laptop and the printer have egos and can think for themselves. The laptop will say "I initiated the printing action" whereas the printer will say "I was the receiver of the printing action".

But in reality, an electric current went from the laptop to the printer, which then caused the printing to happen. So, an engineer would never say "the laptop caused the printing to happen". It was all a play of electricity.

So here, what Shri Krishna is trying to say is that "this", the eternal essence does not act and nor does it get impacted by any action, just like electricity does not really act. It empowers material objects to act without actually acting. Therefore a wise person will never think that the eternal essence can slay or kill or act at all. It is like the sun.

The refrain is clear: "You are the eternal essence - birthless, changeless, eternal and imperishable. The eternal essence does not slay, nor does it get slain." It is repeated throughout the Gita because it will take a significant effort on our part to truly understand and internalize this message.

veda : knows
avinaashinam : imperishable
nityam : eternal
yaha : whosoever
enam : this
ajam : birthless
avyayam: changeless
katham : how
saha : that
purushaha : individual
paartha : O Paartha
kam : who
: cause to be slain
hanti : kill
kam : who

Bhagavad Gita Verse 22, Chapter 2

*vaasaamsi jeernaani yathaa vihaaya navaani grihnaati naroparaani |
tathaa shareeraani vihaaya jeernaanyanyaanisamyaati navaani dehee || 22*
||

Just as an individual will discard old clothes and wears new one, so does the body-dweller discard old bodies and obtain other new bodies.

This is an oft-quoted shloka, and has several aspects and interpretations, just like many shlokas we have seen in this chapter. For our purposes, the main point here is that the eternal essence, or the body dweller, is separate from the human body. When the human body has outlived its purpose, the body dweller discards it and subsequently inherits a new body.

If we have followed the line of reasoning so far, a doubt emerges. How does the eternal essence, which is all-pervading and infinite, enter and leave human bodies? Shouldn't there just be one eternal essence, one body dweller? This question will be answered later in subsequent verses. For now, we should still consider the eternal essence as one but know that the one eternal essence gets attached to this body or that body, and perceives itself to be that body out of an error.

Note the change of meter in this verse.

vaasaamsi : clothes
jeernaani : old
yathaa : just like
vihaaya: discard
navaani : new
grihnaati : wears
aparaani: other
tathaa : so does
shareeraani : bodies
vihaaya : discard
jeernaani : old
ayanyaani : other
samyaati : obtains
navaani : new
dehee : body-dweller

Bhagavad Gita Verse 23-24, Chapter 2

*nainam chindanti shastraani nainam dahati paavakaha |
na chainam kledayanyaapo na shooshayati maaritaha || 23 ||
acchedyoyamadaahyoyamakledyoshosha eva cha |
nityaha sarvagataha sthaanurchaloyam sanaatanaha || 24 ||*

Weapons cannot pierce this (the eternal essence), fire cannot burn this, water cannot wet this, and wind cannot dry this. This is un-cleavable, incombustible, and cannot be wetted or dried. It is eternal, all-pervading, stable, immovable and everlasting.

We have been hearing a lot about the eternal essence since the 13th shloka began. By now, it must be clear to us that the topic of the eternal essence is abstract, and our intellect will have difficulty in grasping it. This is perfectly normal, because the eternal essence cannot be fully comprehended by the intellect. But we can get close to it through negation.

What does negation mean? Let's say you want your friend to buy a shirt for you from the store. You will inform your friend about that the shirt is fuchsia color. If you were to use negation, you would say that the shirt is not regular pink, not dark pink, not fully bright pink etc.

Similarly, the eternal essence here is indicated by negation, that it cannot be cut, cannot be wetted or dried etc.

Shri Krishna will provide us with a few more shlokas about the eternal essence, after which the topic will change to something much more tangible and concrete.

na chindanti : cannot pierce
shastraani : weapons
na dahati : cannot burn
paavakaha : fire
cha : and
na kledayanti : cannot wet
aapaha : water
na shoshayati : cannot dry
maarutaha : wind
acchedyaha : un-cleavable
adaahyaha : incombustible
akledyo : wetted
shosha : dried
eva cha : neither can
nityaha : eternal
sarvagataha : all-pervading
sthaanucha : stable
achalaha : immovable
sanaatanaha : eternal

Notes

1. The Jnyaneshwari, in the commentary for this shloka, declares that the eternal essence cannot be comprehended by our intellect.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 25, Chapter 2

*avyaktoyamachintoyamavikaryoyamuchyate |
tasmaadevam viditvainaam naanushochitumarhasi || 25 ||*

avyaktaha : imperceptible
ayam : this
achintaha : incomprehensible
avikaryaha : unchanging
uchyate : it is said
tasmaad : therefore
evam : thus
viditva : having known
enam : this
naa : not
anushochitum : grieve
arhasi : worthy

This (eternal essence) is imperceptible, this is incomprehensible, this is unchanging, it is said. Therefore, having known this, it is not worthy of grief.

Let's take stock of where we are. In the second chapter, Shri Krishna covers 4 main topics: 1) Informing Arjuna that his logic and reasoning was incorrect 2) Explaining the correct logic and reasoning to Arjuna 3) Providing practical guidance to implement this correct logic and reasoning 4) Describing the attributes of a person who follows this teaching.

We are still exploring the second topic, and this shloka marks the end of the argument that Shri Krishna began in shloka 17. The argument was whether the eternal essence can slay or be slain. Shri Krishna, in this shloka, concludes the argument by saying the following:

"Arjuna, associate yourself with the eternal essence and not the body. The eternal essence is eternal and imperishable; it cannot slay or be slain. Therefore do not grieve for the opposing army's warriors on their imminent death. Their bodies will perish anyway, so you shouldn't grieve for what is bound to perish. The eternal essence which is common between them and you is imperishable, so you should not grieve for that either. Therefore you have no reason to grieve at all."

Let's look further. If something is imperceptible, that means it is beyond the realm of our sense organs. If something is incomprehensible, it is beyond the realm of the intellect. If something is unchanging, then no physical effort will have an impact on it. We are dealing with something that is not of this material world, it is beyond it.

In the next few shlokas, Shri Krishna provides a simpler alternative of logic and reason to Arjuna, after which the teaching takes a turn towards more practical and concrete topics.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 26, Chapter 2

*atha chainam nityajaatam nityam vaa manyase mritam |
tathaapi tvam mahaabaaho naivam shochitumarhasi || 26 ||*

But on the other hand, if you believe that this (eternal essence) constantly takes birth and dies, then also you should not grieve, O mighty armed.

atha cha : but if
nityajaatam : constantly being born
nityam : constantly
vaa : or
manyase : believe
mritam: die
tathaapi : then also
tvam : you
mahaabaaho : O mighty-armed
na : not
evam : this
shochitum : grieve
arhasi : should

Shri Krishna imparted the teaching of the eternal essence to Arjuna in the shlokas we've been seeing. Now, the teaching becomes slightly less abstract and a little more "down-to-earth" as it were. Shri Krishna understands that people like us may find it hard to comprehend the notion of imperishability. Our mind will find a hard time comprehending that something was never born/created, and something will never die/get destroyed.

For example, we may think of the Earth as relatively imperishable, but even then we know from our school geology class that it was formed billions of years ago out of cooling of gases.

Therefore, Shri Krishna says : "O Arjuna, even if you cannot comprehend that the eternal essence is imperishable, it is ok, you can also believe that the eternal essence, which is present in human bodies, undergoes birth and death with the body". In the next few shlokas, Sri Krishna will convince Arjuna that his grief is unfounded even if he accepts that the eternal essence undergoes birth and death.

We may have a question here: Why did Shri Krishna begin his teaching of the Gita by describing the eternal essence? Isn't it a complex, abstract topic that all of us, including Arjuna, would have a hard time understanding? Couldn't he have started with something simpler?

Here's a possible answer. What is described as the eternal essence is the goal, the final result of the Gita teaching. Like a good teacher, Shri Krishna described the end goal to his students before describing the means to attain that goal. Any good teacher will always describe, elaborate upon, and glorify the end goal in the first lecture of a course. This will generate interest, curiosity, focus and dedication from the student. The student may not necessarily understand everything about that goal, but that is ok.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 27, Chapter 2

jaatasya hi dhruvoo mrityudhruvam janma mritasya cha |
tasmaadaparihaaryerthe na tvam shoochitumarhasi || 27 ||

Since one who is born certainly dies, and one who dies certainly is born. Therefore you should not grieve over this inevitable fact.

In the last shloka, Shri Krishna told Arjuna: Even if you think that the eternal essence undergoes birth and death, you should still not grieve. He continues the argument in this shloka.

The notion that birth eventually results in death, and death eventually results in birth is sometimes difficult for us to accept emotionally, but at the intellectual level, most of us acknowledge and accept it. I remember watching a TV show that showed a time lapse (high speed) video of a rodent's corpse decaying into the soil, and small plants and flowers emerging from the soil shortly thereafter. I thought that it very vividly and visually illustrated the cyclical nature of birth and death.

If we look at this example closely, we conclude that the physical body of the animal transformed into the raw material for the body of the flowers and plants. And although we could not see it, we can guess that the eternal essence of the animal "died" and is now "born" as the life force that sustains the plants and flowers.

Therefore we would not grieve for death the animal's body, nor for the death of the life force in it, because both were born again after they died. Similarly, Shri Krishna wanted Arjuna not to grieve for the imminent death of his kinsmen.

jaatasya : one who is born
 hi : since
 dhruvaha : certainly
 mrityuha : die
 janma : born
 mritasya : who is dead
 cha : and
 tasmaad : therefore
 arthe : fact
 na : not
 tvam : you
 shoochitum : grieve
 arhasi : should

Bhagavad Gita Verse 28, Chapter 2

*avyaktaadeeni bhootani vyaktamadhyaani bhaarata |
avyaktanidhanaanyeva tatra kaa paridevanaa || 28 ||*

avyakta : latent
bhootani : all bodies
vyakta : manifest
madhyaani : in the middle
bhaarata : O Bhaarata
nidhanaani : after end
eva : only
tatra : this
kaa : why
paridevanaa : grieve

All bodies are latent in the beginning, they manifest in the middle, O Bhaarata. In the end, they will become latent again, so why should you grieve about this.

This is yet another important and profound shloka with layers and layers of meaning. Let's try to understand it to the best of our ability. Let us look at some examples.

The first example, which is an oft-quoted one, is the seed example. We know that we can hold the seed of a tree, say a mango tree, in the palm of our hand - it is that small. We also know that if we provide the seed with the right climate, soil, water and fertilizer, it will grow into a tall mango tree. The blueprint of the tall tree is present in that small little seed. In other words, the mango tree is latent until the seed is planted. In time, when the seed transforms into a sapling, and then into a tree, we can say that the tree has manifested out of the seed. And in the due course of time, the tree will eventually transform into wood or paper for human consumption, or get burnt and become one with the soil, or something else.

Today is the festival of Diwali when I'm writing this, so I have to add the example of the flowerpot firecracker. For those unfamiliar with it, the flowerpot firecracker is a fist-sized conical shape with a wick on top. After the wick is lit, the firecracker shoots up a dazzling fireworks display in the shape of a fountain, sometimes up to 100 feet tall. This display lasts for about 30-60 seconds. Here we can say that the fireworks display was latent in the firecracker, it came into existence when the wick was lit, and it ended when the gunpowder was exhausted and eventually absorbed in the air. To make it even more relevant, sometimes a hundred or so of these flowerpots are lit in succession, so that as one ends, another one begins.

Finally, here's a somewhat different example. I used to play Beatles songs in a band. We would rehearse most of the Beatles popular songs beforehand. When we began our performance in the club, we would ask the audience to request a song, which we would end up performing. Therefore, the song was latent in our memory, it would come

into existence when we played it, and it would end soon thereafter, after having travelled into the listener's ears, and hopefully into their minds. Also, each time we played it, it would sound just a little different.

What's common in all the 3 examples? In each case there was a beginning where something was hidden or latent, then something happened that caused it to come into existence, and eventually there came a time when that thing no longer existed. In effect, the birth, existence and death of a tree is no different than the "birth", "existence" and "death" of the fireworks display or the song. Birth, existence and death are modifications rather than standalone events, therefore one should not grieve when someone or something comes to an end. It just transforms into something else.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 29, Chapter 2

aashcharyavatpashyati kashchidenamaashcharyavadvadati tathaiva chaanyaha
 |
aashcharyavachchainamanyaha shrunooti shrutvaapyenam veda na chaiva kash-
chit || 29 ||

aashcharyavat : as a wonder
 pashyati : perceive
 kashchit : some
 enam : this
 vadati : speak
 tathaa : similarly
 eva : thus
 cha : and
 anyaha : others
 shrunooti : listen
 shrutva : hearing
 api : also
 enam : this
 veda : know

Some perceive this (eternal essence) as a wonder, and similarly indeed, others speak of it as a wonder; it is a wonder that some hear about this, and after hearing about it, some understand this and some do not.

na : don't

Shri Krishna was getting ready to conclude the topic of the eternal essence. Therefore, he wanted to remind Arjuna about it, and also instill a sense of deep curiosity and interest in him. In this shloka, Shri Krishna did both of those things.

Four types of spiritual seekers are pointed out here. Firstly, there are seekers who have heard about the eternal essence through the Gita or through other means. Usually, most of them will hear about it and forget about it. But there will be some that will become interested in it, and will want to hear more - this is the second category. Of those seekers, some will try to gain an intellectual understanding about it and having done so, will be so enthralled with it that they will keep speaking about it to other people. This is the third category.

But the most devoted and advanced seekers will ultimately perceive the eternal essence directly, and the perception would have occurred without any sense organs. When this happens, there would be no words to describe it. The closest one could come to describing it is when we see something so wonderful that it renders us speechless, like a breathtaking painting or a waterfall.

Note that the meter has changed in this verse to indicate its importance.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 30, Chapter 2

dehi nityamavadhyooyam dehe sarvasya bhaarata |
tasmaatsarvaani bhootani na tvam shochitumarhasi || 30 ||

dehi : body-dweller
 nityam : eternal
 avadhyaha : imperishable
 dehe : bodies
 sarvasya : in all
 bhaarata : O Bhaarata
 tasmaat : therefore
 sarvaani : all
 bhootani : beings
 tvam : you
 shochitum : grieve
 na arhasi : should not

**This eternal and imperishable body-dweller dwells in all bodies,
 O Bhaarata. Therefore, you should not grieve for any or all beings.**

With this shloka, Shri Krishna concludes the topic of the eternal essence. Now, having followed the teaching so far, we would probably have some questions. Let's try to address some of them.

So if we were to ask ourselves "I have studied the Gita for a while now, what is the message in a nutshell so far?". Or in management-speak "What is the net-net?". It is this shloka. Therefore, even if we may not remember all the shlokas about the eternal essence, we should not forget this shloka.

Here's another question: "We have covered the entire first chapter, as well as some part of the second chapter. Where is God in all of this?" We have purposely avoided the word "God" in our discussions because Shri Krishna has not yet uttered that word in any teaching so far. As we proceed through the Gita, Shri Krishna will bring up this topic at the appropriate time. For now, if we go to a place of worship like a temple, we can still continue to pray to God, knowing that the eternal essence is an integral part of God as well.

The pragmatist among us would ask "All this abstract stuff is well and good, how do we apply it in our daily life?". And the answer is - stay tuned! The topics will become more practical starting with the next shloka. All we need to remember is the examples from these shlokas: the eternal essence is like the sun, actionless and changeless. It is like the water that pervades the entire cloth. And it is like the car-dweller who occupies and leaves the car once it is old.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 31, Chapter 2

*svadharmamapi chaavekshya na vikampitumarhasi |
dharmyaaddhi yuddhaacchreyonyatkshatriyasya na vidyate || 31 ||*

Furthermore, you should not be disturbed when you consider your duty, because there is no other glory for a warrior that a righteous war.

Shri Krishna now begins a fresh topic in these next few shlokas. He deals with the issue of svadharma, or one's own duty. It is important to remember that although Shri Krishna has addressed these shlokas to a mighty warrior, each of us has to interpret what they mean for us.

So, what exactly is one's duty? In this context, it is not something we have to do because someone else is forcing us, or because the so-called caste system says so.

Duty is work that one enjoys doing, has the aptitude and training for doing, and is not illegal or unethical. The practice of medicine becomes a svadharma for a doctor when he or she finds joy in the work, has completed medical training, and uses it for the betterment of society. Education becomes svadharma for students when they find joy in attending classes and studying for exams.

Note that the same person could have more than one svadharma. For example, a woman could be a mother at home, and executive at work.

One may ask, "I have the training and aptitude for my profession. I certainly do not perform any illegal activities. But I don't find joy in my work. It is a drudgery for me, I only do it so that I can earn a living. How do I find joy in my work?". Shri Krishna has anticipated this question and will give us the trick for addressing this question very soon.

Let's also understand why Shri Krishna chose to introduce the topic of svadharma right after concluding the topic of the eternal essence. As we saw earlier, most of us are not at the advanced stage of spirituality where we have the ability to perceive the eternal essence in all beings, even though we may have an abstract or theoretical understanding of it by now. We are people with professions, jobs, careers and responsibilities. We are not in a position to retire to a monastery. Most of our

svadharmam : your duty
api : furthermore
cha : and
avekshya : consider
na : not
vikampitum : disturbed
arhasi : should
dharmyaat : righteous
hi : because
yuddhaat : than war
shreyaha : glory
anyat : any other
kshatriyasya : for a warrior
na vidyate : there is not

day is spent in work.

Knowing this, Shri Krishna is gently introducing us to a more practical method of accessing the eternal essence. In this method, we can continue to lead our daily lives and still orient ourselves to accessing that eternal essence. As a side effect of this, we will also find joy and fulfillment in our work.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 32, Chapter 2

*yadrichchayaa chopapannam svargadvaaramapaavritam |
 sukhinaha kshatriyaaha paartha labhante yuddhameedrisham || 32 ||*
**Fortunate are those warriors who will fight such a war, O Paartha. In-
 deed, it is like a door to heaven that has opened without any effort.
 **

cha : indeed
 upapannam : obtain
 svargadvaaram : door of heaven
 apaavritam : open
 sukhinaha : fortunate
 kshatriyaaha : those warriors
 paartha : O Paartha
 labhante : obtain
 yuddham : war
 eedrisham : this

**Fortunate are those warriors who will fight such a war, O Paartha.
 Indeed, it is like a door to heaven that has opened without any ef-
 fort.<i>**

Any singer or musician will look forward to performing in a large auditorium like Carnegie Hall rather than perform in a small 20 seat theatre. A doctor who genuinely cares about saving lives will tirelessly and joyfully work extra hard if she is handling an emergency room with a huge number of patients rather than serving only 1-2 patients a day.

In other words, a person performing his or her svadharma would always prefer working hard towards a challenging assignment rather than simply pulling along in a mediocre one. Shri Krishna pointed this out to Arjuna by reminding him that a true warrior would look forward to the challenge of fighting the Kaurava army, which was filled with world-renowned warriors.

How is this relevant to us? Our work should give us joy, our work should be its own reward. If we have chosen a profession that feels like drudgery, if we feel that any new work given to us is a chore rather than a challenge, if all we can do is complain, then we should re-examine whether we are really following our svadharma, or we are qualified to do something else.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 33, Chapter 2

*atha chetvamimam dharmyam samgraamam na karshyasi |
tataha svadharmam keertim cha hitvaa paapamavaapsyasi || 33 ||*

On the other hand, if you do not undertake this righteous war, then by forsaking your duty and valour, you will incur sin.

The word "sin" could mean several things to several people. Let us understand the meaning used here. If you live in society anywhere, in a city, town, village etc. you are always bound by certain laws. If you conduct an act that goes against the law, then it is called a crime. Stealing a car, for example, is a crime.

Similarly, if someone does not perform their svadharma or duty, or does something counter to their svadharma, it is equivalent to a crime under a cosmic or universal law. That crime is termed as a sin.

Therefore, Shri Krishna urges Arjuna and us to consider the repercussions of not conducting our svadharma. Like a good teacher, he had explained the benefits of the teaching earlier, and now he elaborates on the downside of not following the teaching in this and the next shloka.

atha : on the other hand
chet : if
tvam : you
imam : this
dharmyam : righteous
samgraamam : war
karshyasi : undertake
tataha : then
svadharmam : your duty
keertim : valour
cha : and
hitvaa : forsaking
paapam : sin
avaapsyasi : incur

Bhagavad Gita Verse 34-36, Chapter 2

akeertim chaapi bhootani kathayishyanti teavyayaam |
 sambhaavitasya chaakeertirmarnaadatirichyate || 34 ||
 bhayaadranaaduparatam mansyante tvaam mahaarathahaa |
 yeshaam cha tvam bahumato bhootvaa yaasyasi laagham || 35 ||
 avaachyavaadaamshcha bahoovadishyanti tavaahitaaha |
 nindantastava saamarthyam tato duhkhataram nu kim || 36 ||

Moreover, everyone will also speak about your infamy forever. This will be a great sorrow, worse even than death, for an honourable person. Great warriors will believe that you disengaged from the war due to cowardice. Even though they once regarded you highly, they will now look down upon you. Your enemies will say many unspeakable things about you. They will condemn your prowess. What could be a greater sorrow than this?

Aristotle said that to make an argument forceful, convincing and persuasive, one has to incorporate three elements: ethos, logos and pathos, or in other words, emotion, logic and the reputation of the speaker. After having using logic in his teaching, Shri Krishna uses a call to emotion as a tool of persuasion.

For a great warrior like Arjuna, reputation was everything. Therefore, Shri Krishna advised Arjuna to remember his svadharma, his duty and fight, or else he would lose his reputation as a mighty warrior.

We can learn so much from the way Shri Krishna builds and delivers his arguments to Arjuna, not just from the teaching itself. Whenever we have to make a presentation at work, or want to convince our spouse or our parents of something that is important to us, it is always better to a mix of logic and emotion in our arguments rather than just chose one or the other.

akeertim : infamy
 cha : and
 api : also
 bhootani : everybody
 kathayishyanti : speak about
 te : you
 avyayaam : forever
 sambhaavitasya : honourable person
 cha : also
 akeertim : infamy
 marnaat : than death
 atirichyate : greater sorrow
 bhayaat : due to fear
 rinaat : of war
 uparatam : disengaged
 mansyante : believe
 tvaam : you
 maharataaha : great warriors
 yeshaam : in whose
 cha : and
 tvam : you
 bahumataha : highly regarded
 bhootvaa : were
 laagham : fall short
 yaasyasi : obtain
 avaachyavaadaan : unspeakable words
 cha : also
 bahoov : many
 vadishyanti : will speak
 tava : your
 ahitaaha : enemies
 nindantaha : will condemn
 saamarthyam : prowess
 tataha : of that
 duhkhataram : greater sorrow
 nu kim : what will

Bhagavad Gita Verse 37, Chapter 2

*hato vaa praapsyasi svargam jitvaa vaa bhokshyase maheem |
 tasmaaduttishta kaunteya yuddhaaya kritanishchayaha || 37 ||*

If you are killed, you will obtain heaven; and if you win, you will enjoy this earth. Therefore, O Kaunteya, arise and decide to engage in war.

Here Shri Krishna makes yet another plea to Arjuna not to shirk away from duty. This time, however, the message is more specific - Shri Krishna does not want Arjuna to resort to inaction or stasis.

Here Shri Krishna is saying : "Arjuna, regardless of whether you win or lose, the outcome will always be favourable. But the longer you keep pondering over your fight or not-to-fight dilemma, the further you move away from action towards inaction. Under no circumstances is inaction permissible. Therefore, fight!"

When faced with tough situations, our natural instinct is to move away from action towards inaction. There is always a hesitation, sometimes procrastination. And usually, this hesitation is caused by a fear of failure, or fear of trying something that we have not done before.

But Shri Krishna advises us that as long as we are performing actions that are aligned to our svadharma, our duty, action is always preferable to inaction or procrastination. The outcome of performing an action in accordance with our duty will always be favourable.

hataha : you are killed
 vaa : if
 praapsyasi : obtain
 svargam : heaven
 jitvaa : you win
 vaa : if
 bhokshyase : enjoy
 maheem : earth
 tasmaat : therefore
 uttishta : arise
 kaunteya : O Kaunteya
 yuddhaaya : in war
 kritanishchayaha : decide to engage

Notes

1. In common usage, Dharma means religion, so sva-dharma could mean "one's religion". And so, this verse has the potential to be translated as "everyone should fight a war for one's religion". This is a misinterpretation. If one really is a warrior (in the army, navy etc.) then they should definitely fight for their country. But if one is not a warrior by profession, there is no need to fight.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 38, Chapter 2

*sukhaduhkhe same kritvaa laabhaalaabhau jayaajayau |
tato yuddhaaya yujyasva naivam papamavapsyasi || 38 ||*

sukhaduhkhe : joy or sorrow
same : equal
kritvaa : make
laabhaalaabhau : gain or loss
jayaajayau : victory or defeat
tataha : then
yuddhaya : in war
yujyasva : engage
evam : in this manner
paapam : sin
na avapsyasi : will not incur

Treat joy or sorrow, gain or loss, victory or defeat with equanimity, and then engage in war. By doing so, you will not incur sin.

This is one of the most important shlokas in the second chapter, and perhaps in the entire Gita. In essence, Shri Krishna instructed Arjuna to maintain equanimity, an "even keel" attitude, not just in war, but in any circumstance in life.

Let us take stock of where we are. We had seen that Shri Krishna was covering 4 main topics: 1) Informing Arjuna that his logic and reasoning was incorrect 2) Explaining the correct logic and reasoning to Arjuna 3) Providing practical guidance to implement this correct logic and reasoning 4) Describing the attributes of the individual who follows this teaching. We are currently in the set of shlokas covering topic 2 - the correct reasoning and logic.

After the first sub-topic of the eternal essence concluded, we explored the second sub-topic of svadharma. Shri Krishna is now about to conclude this sub-topic by pointing us to the ultimate goal of our spiritual efforts.

Having reoriented ourselves with the scheme of the second chapter, let's now examine the current shloka. On first glance, the lesson in this shloka seems unapproachable and impossible to carry out, to some extent.

We encounter joy, sorrow, victory, defeat, gain and loss almost everyday, even several times a day. And each time we encounter any of these situations, we get emotionally and sometimes even physically affected by them. At work, a meeting with your boss does not go well. But on another day, your boss gives you an exemplary speech on a project well executed. How can we possibly treat these as equal?

Shri Krishna fully understands this point. Here, he only lays out the ultimate goal for us: the goal of equanimity, or treating each and every life situation equally without getting agitated. Now that we know what the goal is, he will gently guide us through a path of practical

advice throughout the rest of the teaching in the Gita.

So as we read the rest of the second chapter, if we think we have lost sight of the goal, let's remember this shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 39, Chapter 2

*eshaa tebhihitaa saankhye buddhiryoge tvimaam shrunoo |
buddhyaa yukto yayaa paartha karmabandham prahaasyasi || 39 ||*

eshaa : this
te : for you
abhihitaa : has been stated
buddhiryoge : discipline of action
tu : you
imaam : this
shrunoo : listen to
buddhyaa : understanding
yuktaha : equipped
yayaa : which
paartha : O Paartha
karmabandham : bonds of action
prahaasyasi : cast off

This discipline of knowledge has been stated to you. Now, listen to the discipline of action. Having equipped yourself with this understanding, O Paartha, you will cast of your bonds-of-action.

Shri Krishna uses this shloka to conclude the theoretical topic of correct logic and reasoning, and transition on to the means of attaining that knowledge. The remaining shlokas in the second chapter are extremely practical and can be immediately used in our daily lives. They will enable us to conduct our svadharma while always keeping the attitude specified in the prior shloka : treat any situation, joyful or sorrowful, with equanimity.

The word yoga comes twice in this shloka, so let's examine it more closely. Usually, we think of yoga as an ancient art of physical exercise. However, the word yoga in the Bhagavad Gita has a different meaning. Translated into English, the meaning is a mix between the words technique and discipline. In fact, as we saw earlier, each chapter of the Gita is a yoga, or a technique and discipline, unto itself.

There is an interesting word in the last part of this shloka - "bonds of action". It almost seems like a thick rope exists, one end tied to our leg and the other end tied to the action. What does is bondage?

An action that increases extreme attachment or hatred towards anything - an object, person or situation - "binds" us to that thing. It is similar to addiction. We may smoke a cigarette once, but unless we have high self control, we want to experience it again. This desire to repeat the experience eventually results in an addiction and we cannot live without it.

The important point here is that no action or object cannot bind us; it is the thought behind it that binds. For a non-smoker, a pack of cigarettes does not cause bondage. Conversely, for a smoker, just the mere sight of the pack of cigarettes prompts him to smoke. For things subtler than addiction, we can tell whether or not an action will cause bondage by checking whether it is for the service of one's selfish ego or not.

Consider an executive making a presentation to her management team. One scenario could be that she makes the presentation with the motive of getting a promotion. Another scenario could be that she makes the presentation with the motive of increasing the sales of the corporation so that it benefits all the stakeholders. In the first case, the action binds her. In the second case, it doesn't.

Alternatively, consider a musician performing on stage. If he performs with the sole motive to get applause and get nominated for an award, the action will bind him. But if he performs with the sole motive of entertaining the audience and honouring his craft, the action will not bind him.

Shri Krishna gently reveals the technique of cutting off these bindings in the rest of the chapter.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 40, Chapter 2

*nehaabhikramanaashosti pratyavayo na vidyate |
svalpamapyasya dharmasya traayate mahato bhayaat || 40 ||*

na : no
iha : here
abhikramanaasha : loss of effort
na : not
asti : happens
pratyavayaha : negative result
na vidyate : does not happen
svalpam : a little
api : also
asya : this
dharmasya : this knowledge
traayate : protects from
mahataha : massive
bhayaat : fear

Here, there is no loss of effort, nor is there any negative result. Even a little of this knowledge protects one from the most massive fear.

As mentioned before, we are all set to embark upon the practical aspects of the Gita teaching.

Now, whenever we are about to begin a project, a few doubts or fears may arise in our minds. Two of the most common fears are (a) what will happen if I don't follow the steps exactly? and (b) what will happen if I make a minor mistake and the whole thing backfires?

Consider a student who has left the comfort of his home to pursue higher studies abroad. Now, he usually has to learn how to cook since his mom is not around to cook anymore. If he tries to prepare a meal, it will usually come out wrong because the steps were not followed correctly. Or worse still, it may totally backfire and yield a negative result - he may burn the food which will set off a fire alarm.

Moreover, for most Indians who hold the Gita in high reverence, we may harbour a notion that any teaching of the Gita needs to be followed to the letter, like a priest who recited mantras at a puja. And if we don't do this, we will incur sin.

Shri Krishna reassures Arjuna that the teaching of buddhi yoga is absolutely risk free. It will not result in "abhikrama-naasha" or error caused by not following the steps correctly. It will also not create "pratyavaha dosha", i.e. yielding a negative result.

Therefore, Shri Krishna informs us that there is absolutely no excuse for holding back in implementing these teachings due to fear of any sort. Even if we practice a little bit of this teaching, it protects us from the most massive fear - the fear of death.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 41, Chapter 2

*vyavasaayaatmikaa buddhirekeha kurunandana |
bahushaakhaa hyanantaashcha budhyovyavasaayinaam || 41 ||*

vyavasaayaatmikaa : determined
buddhihi : thoughts
ekaa : focused
iha : here
kurunandana : O Kurunandana
bahushaakhaa : many branches
hi : consists of
anantaaha : infinite
cha : and
budhyaha : thoughts
avyavasaayinaam : irresolute

**Here, the thoughts of the determined are focused, O Kurunandana.
The thoughts of the irresolute are many-branched and infinite.**

From this shloka onwards, Shri Krishna began to provide Arjuna with a practical "toolkit" of techniques that would enable him to conduct his svadharma with equanimity of mind. This shloka explains the first technique in this toolkit: maintaining constant focus on the goal prescribed in the Gita teaching.

The goal mentioned in a prior shloka is clear to all of us : equanimity of mind in any situation. So the very first thing that Shri Krishna instructs us to make a promise to ourselves that "I will only focus on one desire - that of maintaining equanimity. If it has nothing to do with my svadharma, I will not entertain that desire."

Consider an example. When Mr X visits the grocery store with a shopping list, he quickly and efficiently gets the items on the list and leaves the store. He is focused on acquiring the objects in his shopping list. But when he visits the mall or an electronics store, his mind starts entertaining "many-branched and infinite thoughts" e.g : "Oh look at this new iPod", "Can I get it cheaper here?", "When's the new HDTV coming out" etc. and eventually ends up spending over 3 hours in the mall. Therefore, focus is extremely important in any endeavour.

Now, let's assume we focus on the one desire to maintain equanimity. How do we know whether we are on the right track? To that end, this shloka very beautifully gives us a "checklist" so that we can keep tabs on our focus. At some point every day, preferably at the end of the day, we should ask ourselves two questions and write down the answers in a journal:

1. What objects/people/situations did I keep obsessing about today?
2. How many of these obsessive thoughts did I have?

If we notice over time that the quantity of our obsessive thinking has begun to diminish, it means that our intellect is beginning to focus on

the ultimate goal of the Gita teaching.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 42-44, Chapter 2

*yaaimaam pushpitaam vaacham pravadantyavipashchitaha |
 vedavaadarataaha paartha naanyadastiiti vaadinaha || 42 ||
 kaamaatmaanaha svargaparaa janmakarmaphalapradaam |
 kriyaavisheshabahulaam bhogaishvaryagati prati || 43 ||
 bhogaishvaryaprasaktaanaam tayaapahyatachetasaam |
 vyavasaayaatmikaa buddhihi samaadhau na vidheeyate || 44 ||*

The unwise utter flowery statements. They are only interested in the Veda-related topics, O Paartha, saying that "there is nothing else". Those who harbour material desires, and hold heaven as the ultimate goal, perform actions that result in rebirth. They describe various actions for obtaining pleasure and power. But, those who are extremely attached to pleasure and power, who are attracted to these (flowery words), do not possess a determined intellect, and will never achieve samaadhi.

Shri Krishna explained the importance of focus in the prior shloka. Here, he describes the tendencies that will prevent someone from having that focus. In essence, what he is saying here is that any individual who only thinks about one material desire after another, will never reach the state of absolute equanimity. The word used in this shloka to describe that state is "samaadhi".

Most of our youth is spent in gaining worldly knowledge. In the Gita, "Vedas" can be interpreted as "all worldly knowledge" from our standpoint. This knowledge is useful for performing our svadharma through our chosen profession. But most of us end up using this knowledge as a means to fulfill a never-ending stream of material desires, that will give us more and more pleasure and power. Our goal is never svadharma itself, it is material desires. And with each material desire, the shloka says that we are reborn.

The word rebirth here has a specific meaning. Each time you harbour a new material desire, you are "reborn". This is because each new material desire prompts you towards a whole new set of selfishly motivated actions, taking the focus away from your svadharma, and in doing so, moving you away from the ultimate goal of maintaining equanimity. For example, if you want a new car, you are reborn as a "car desiring individual" who will put in extra effort to earn money for a new car. But by the time the new car arrives, several new desires

yaam : those
 imaam : like this
 pushpitaam : flowery
 vaacham : words
 pravadanti : who speak
 avipashchitaha : unwise
 vedavaadarataaha : topics from the vedas
 paartha : O Paartha
 anyata : anything else
 vaadinaha : they say
 kaamaatmaanaha : those who harbour material desires
 svargaparaaha : those who hold heaven as the ultimate goal
 janmakarmaphalapradaam : those actions which result in rebirth
 kriyaavisheshabahulaam : those who describe lots of actions
 bhogaishvaryagati prati : for obtaining pleasure and power
 bhogaishvaryaa : pleasure and power
 prasaktaanaam : extremely attached to
 apahyatachetasaam : attracted towards
 vyavasaayaatmikaa : determined
 buddhihi : intellect
 samaadhau : samaadhi
 na vidheeyate : not possible

have sprung up, resulting in new "rebirths".

Now, the shloka also mentions that such individuals hold heaven as the ultimate goal. The word "heaven" also has a specific meaning here. It does not refer to some place up in the sky. It refers to a future state where you will be happy after you fulfill your desire. But by shifting your focus towards heaven i.e. the future, you make your present moment unhappy. This kind of thinking also prompts you towards selfishly motivated action.

Therefore, these shlokas reiterate the importance of keeping a focused attitude towards maintaining equanimity, and one does that by not harbouring endless material desires.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 45, Chapter 2

*traigunyavishayaa vedaa nistraigunyo bhavaarjuna |
nirdvandvo nityasatvastho niryogakshemam aatmavaan || 45 ||*

traigunyavishayaaha : describe the three
gunas
vedaaha : Vedas
bhava : become
arjuna : O Arjuna
nirdvandvaha : free from dualities
nityasatvasthaha : steeped in sattva
niryogakshemam : free from acquisition
and preservation
aatmavaan : established in the eternal
essence

The Vedas describe the three gunas. Transcend those gunas, O Arjuna. Free yourself from dualities, remain always in sattva, give up thinking about acquisition and preservation, and be established in the eternal essence.

The first technique in our toolkit was the art of maintaining focus to reduce the quantity of unnecessary thoughts. Shri Krishna now provides us with the second technique in our toolkit: slowly improving the quality of our thoughts. This shloka is jam-packed with practical tips to improve our thought quality, so let's tackle this shloka part by part.

Firstly, an absolute prerequisite to improving thought quality is to be mindful of what we are thinking. Most of us tend to perform actions daily almost on autopilot. If we are not aware of what we are thinking while performing an action, we will not be able to improve the quality of our thoughts. Therefore, the shloka advises us to think deeply about whether any action we perform is selfish, or is in service of our svadharma. Doing so repeatedly will reveal the true nature of our thoughts.

Secondly, the shloka advises us to go beyond obsessive thinking about the interplay of the 3 gunas. In a nutshell, there are 3 types of gunas or tendencies that are responsible for creating everything in this material world. Therefore, the shloka advises us to start contemplating spiritual knowledge daily, which will automatically reduce material thoughts.

Thirdly, the shloka speaks about dualities. Dualities are the positive and negative mental labels associated with thoughts - love/hate, joyful/sorrowful, pleasurable/painful etc. So practically speaking, any thought that demonstrates extreme attachment or hatred towards an object, person or situation is a poor quality thought because it strengthens the ego. Whenever we catch ourselves saying something like "I cannot live without watching TV everyday", we should be on guard. It is better to substitute that thought with something like "I enjoy watching TV, but I can live without it if I want to". Similarly, if we have a thought like "I want to kill my boss" we can start to think "My boss

is difficult to work with sometimes, but he is a human being just like anyone else".

Finally, the shloka advises us to stop worrying about acquisition and preservation. Most of us are worried about two things - acquiring something, and preserving something once it is acquired. A corporate executive will keep thinking about the promotion. And once he has it, he will do all he can to make sure he holds on to his new post. But the shloka informs us that as long as we are diligently performing our svadharma, we will automatically get what we need to live a good life. Therefore, we should stop obsessing over acquisition and preservation, which is an impediment to maintaining equanimity.

Let's summarize the techniques learned so far as follows. The first technique helped us reduce the quantity of unnecessary thoughts. The second technique helps us improve the quality of our thoughts by substituting poor quality thoughts with good quality thoughts. It is helpful to maintain a diary to track the quantity and quality of our thoughts, so that we can gauge our progress. It is no different than following a disciplined approach to losing weight or quitting smoking.

A question may arise here : "How can I stop thinking about the material world after I perform my svadharma? After I come home from work I need to watch TV, surf the web, watch movies, sports etc. in order to be entertained. Won't life become boring?" The answer is provided in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 46, Chapter 2

*yaavaanaartha udapaane sarvathaha samplutodake |
taavan sarvheshu vedeshu braahmanasya vijaanataha || 46 ||*

yaavaan : just like
aatha : use
udapaane : well
sarvathaha : everywhere
samplut : flood
udake: water
taavan : similarly
sarvheshu : everything
vedeshu : contents of the Vedas
braahmanasya : a braahmana
vijaanataha : realized

Just like there is no use for a well when water is flooding everywhere, so does a brahmana know all the contents of the Vedas.

In the last shloka we asked a question : if we were to reduce our dependence on worldly things, wouldn't we have to give up TV, music, games, parties etc. Wouldn't that be a boring life?

Think about your childhood. All of had a craving for toys when we were kids. But there came a stage when most of us outgrew toys because we began to think about higher things like career aspirations etc. So all toys began to look the same to us, regardless of the price, shape, size, colour, brand etc. , from a simple spinning top to an expensive model airplane.

Similarly, Shri Krishna says that once our thoughts become high quality, i.e. they pertain to our svadharma and to spiritual contemplation, then automatically we will begin to feel less need for any external entertainment and enjoyment.

Therefore, this shloka says that one who always maintains equanimity will have known all there is to know about the material world, and will begin to transcend worldly matters and knowledge.

In this shloka we notice that the word "braahmana" appears. Braahmana here does not refer to the caste system meaning. It refers to an individual who is always contemplating about brahman, which is nothing but the eternal essence that we learned about in the early part of this chapter. Also the word Veda, like in previous verses, refers to worldly knowledge.

Now, the two techniques prescribed so far, reducing unnecessary thoughts and improving quality of thought, were preparatory techniques. They are meant to prepare us for learning the main technique of the teaching, which is covered in the next shloka. It is probably the most famous and oft-quoted shloka in the Gita. We shall cover it in great detail.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 47, Chapter 2

*karmanyevaadhikaaraste maa phaleshu kadaachana |
maa karmaphalaheturbhoormaa te sangostvaakarmani || 47 ||*

You only have authority over action, not ever to the result. Don't be motivated by the result, and don't get attached to inaction.

As mentioned earlier, this shloka is probably the most known and oft-quoted shloka in the Gita. There are many chapters in the Gita that go deeper into the layers and layers of meaning packed into this shloka. Given the richness of this shloka, we shall try to understand it to the best extent possible. Since there are several messages in this shloka, let's examine the teaching part by part.

Let's start with the first half of the shloka. The message is as follows. Shri Krishna says that we have authority only over the actions performed by us, but never on the result. In other words, we do not have complete control over the outcome of any activity. As we grow older and spend more time in this world, we know this fact instinctively. But because we forget it, we tend to get disappointed when things don't go our way, or get elated when things do.

Look at our own lives, we can take any number of examples to test this theory. Take a simple thing as catching a bus that has just arrived on the other side of the road. We run to catch the bus. But even in such a simple task, the outcome is not guaranteed. If we are able to catch the bus then all's well. But there are several other outcomes that could occur. The bus may leave before we get to the stop. We could catch the wrong bus. Once aboard, we may not have the fare. Worst of all, we could get hit by a car while crossing the road.

Or consider a complex task as a surgeon performing heart surgery. Take the world's best doctor trained at the world's best college, in the surgery room of the world's best hospital with the world's best surgery team. Even with all these things, that surgeon will never have a 100 pct success rate.

The outcome of any action is like an equation where we provide some of the variables, but not all of them. In fact, we may not even know all the variables that end up determining the outcome.

karmani : action
eva : only
adhikaaraha : authority
te : your
maa : not
phaleshu : result
kadaachana : ever
maa : no
karmaphalahetuhu : motivated by result
bhuha : become
te : you
asangaha : attached
astu : happen
akarmani : inaction

Notes

1. "Phala" literally means "fruit". Fruit of a result has a "seed" in it, which has the potential to generate yet another action.

So unless we logically convince ourselves that we do not have complete control over the result of an action, we will not be able to learn the main teaching the second half of this shloka. We will tackle that teaching in the next post.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 47, Chapter 2 (continued)

*karmanyevaadhikaaraste maa phaleshu kadaachana |
maa karmaphalaheturbhoomaa te sangostvakarmani || 47 ||*

karmani : action
eva : only
adhikaaraha : authority
te : your
maa : not
phaleshu : result
kadaachana : ever
maa : no
karmaphalahetuhu : motivated by result
bhuha : become
te : you
asangaha : attached
astu : happen
akarmani : inaction

You only have authority over action, not ever to the result. Don't be motivated by the result, and don't get attached to inaction.

Now let's move into the main teaching of this shloka. Here Shri Krishna urges us to not worry about the outcome, i.e. the result, of the action. How will this work? Let's recap two important points. We have seen earlier that when we perform our svadharma, we derive joy from the performance of action itself since we have the interest, desire and aptitude for it. We also learned in the last shloka that we do not have complete control over the outcome.

Therefore, we should never be motivated by the outcome when we know we have executed our actions with perfection, and that we do not have complete control on the outcome. Motivation for the outcome creates bondage - it is like a rope that ties us into the future. Instead, if we give up motivation for the outcome, there is no such binding created.

Let's address a few doubts that most of us may have when we hear this teaching. The first doubt could be : "If I am not motivated by the result, how will I know where I am heading? I want my project to be executed on time, I want my team to be inspired by a goal, I want progress in my career. How can I do all these things if I am not motivated by the result?"

To answer this, let's closely look at what Shri Krishna has prescribed. There is nothing wrong with aiming for a specific goal, or even to be inspired by it. Setting a vision, defining a goal, making a plan - all these things are absolutely required for the perfect execution of any work. We can always be motivated by the goal, but not be motivated by the outcome. There is a subtle but important difference.

Another doubt could be as follows: "If I know that I am only partially responsible for the outcome then why should I do any action at all? I will just quit my job, sit at home and do nothing."

Shri Krishna cautions us not to do so in the last part of the shloka

- do not get attached to inaction. If we know that we have performed our svadharma and our actions to the best of our ability, we know that in the end we will achieve our goals, even if things may not turn out as anticipated sometimes. But we should never totally give up and do nothing.

What we have learned so far is just the tip of the iceberg. This shloka is the seed for the topic of Karmayoga, or the discipline of action. Shri Krishna expounds on this topic at great length in the forthcoming chapters. Arjuna has several questions and doubts in regards to this teaching, all of which will be addressed by Shri Krishna one by one.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 48, Chapter 2

*yogasthaha kuru karmaani sangam tyaktvaa dhananjaya |
siddhyasiddhyoh samo bhootvaa samatvam yoga uchyaate || 48 ||*

Perform action, established in yoga, and discard attachment, O Dhananjaya. Remain balanced in success and failure. Yoga is defined as equanimity.

yogasthaha : established in yoga
kuru : perform
karmaani : action
sangam : attachment
tyaktvaa : discard
dhananjaya : O Dhananjaya
siddhyasiddhyoh : in success and failure
samaha : balanced
bhootvaa : remain
samatvam : equanimity
yoga : yoga
uchyaate : defined

This shloka pushes further the teaching of Karmayoga by advising us to begin discarding our attachments to objects in the material world. Obviously, we will not be able to totally discard all our attachments in one day. This will take a long time. However, Shri Krishna asks us to slowly start treading on this path. Why is he asking us to do so? He wants us to diminish our hankering for the outcome of our actions, and the only way to do that is by reducing our attachments to the material world.

Consider a mother who takes care of her 5 year old child. She gets extremely attached to it and develops lots of expectations: my child will take care of me when it grows up, it will become a doctor etc. If those things don't happen, she will generate lots of sorrow for herself. But a nanny taking care of a child will not be attached to it. She will perform her svadharma by taking good care of child. However, she will have zero expectations from the child, and therefore she will be able to maintain equanimity in action.

The only difference between the mother and the nanny is their attitude - one is attached, one is unattached. And the one that has attachments has expectations for the future, the other does not.

Now in this shloka we encounter Shri Krishna defining the term "yoga". It has nothing to do with arcane rituals. It has nothing to do with complex physical postures. It is a surprisingly simple and practical definition: equanimity of mind during performance of action. It is how the nanny operated in the earlier example.

So what is the practical technique to cast off attachments? How do we actually do this? We have to rid ourselves of all expectations and worries about the future, as well as memories of the past. If we eliminate constant thinking about past and future, we can channel all that energy into the present moment and into executing the task at hand.

Notes

1. There are four kinds of attachment: attachment to result (I want a reward for singing this song), action (I will sing a song only in my way), doership (I will sing the song, not anyone else), non-doership (I am the non-singer of this song).

We probably have experienced instances in our lives where we were so joyfully and blissfully immersed in our work that we forgot where we were and what time it was. But those experiences were few and far between. By going deeper into each and every task we perform, no matter how big or small the task, we will minimize past and future thinking, which will enable us to remain balanced regardless of success and failure. This is the true definition of yoga.

To recap, our toolkit contains 3 techniques: reducing unnecessary thoughts, improving quality of thought, and focusing on the task and hand. We can practice this teaching with mundane tasks, and move on to more complex ones. Next time we wash dishes, let's give each movement of the hand our single and undivided attention, and try to sustain it while washing each and every dish. Give it a shot, see what happens.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 49, Chapter 2

*doorena hyavaram karma buddhiyogaaddhananjaya |
buddhau sharanamanviccha kripanaah phalahetavaha || 49 ||*

doorena hi : far
avaram : lower
karma : selfish action
buddhiyogaat : unselfish action
dhananjaya : O Dhananjaya
buddhau : knowledge of equanimity
sharanam : refuge
anviccha : seek
kripanaah : pitiable
phalahetavaha : those motivated by results

Selfish action is far lower than unselfish action, O Dhananjaya. Seek refuge in the knowledge of equanimity. Pitiable are those who are motivated by results.

So far, Shri Krishna described the performance of unselfish actions while maintaining equanimity of mind. In this shloka, he expresses his views on individuals acting with a selfish motive. To indicate his level of contempt for them, he calls them "pitiable".

Lets say there is a large family living under one roof. Everyone has a part to play: some people work to bring in money, some are students, some take care of the house etc. Now, there is a large TV in the living room and anyone in the family can watch it. But, if one person starts monopolizing the TV and prevents others from watching it, what would you call that person? Wouldn't you call him selfish and pitiable? Well, the world we live in is no different than this large family. Any selfishly motivated actions eventually causes more harm than good.

Now, all of us will agree that acting in an unselfish manner is a good thing, in theory. But we very rarely practice it in our lives. Why is this so? The most common argument is that if we become unselfish, other selfish people will take advantage of us and we will probably "lose" in life.

So how do we address this argument? Acting with an unselfish attitude does not mean that we become weak-minded wimps. If someone is obstructing us from performing our svadharma, we should deal with that individual in a firm manner appropriately. And if we truly practice equanimity of mind while performing actions, we will respond to the situation using our intellect and not our emotions. Therefore we will not do something rash and harmful to the situation at hand.

Therefore, the teaching of Karmayoga encourages us to slowly change our attitude to one of unselfish action, and maintain equanimity of mind while performing actions.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 50, Chapter 2

*buddhiyukto jahaateha ubhe sukritadushkrite |
tasmaadyogaaya yujyasva yogah karmasu kaushalam || 50 ||*

buddhiyuktaha : with equanimity
jahaati : give up
ubhe : both
sukritadushkrite : merit and sin
tasmaat : therefore
yogaaya : in yoga
yujyasva : established
yogah : yoga
karmasu : in action
kaushalam : perfect

One who is equipped with equanimity in this life discards both merit and sin. Therefore remain established in yoga; yoga results in perfect action.

In the last chapter, Arjuna raised several concerns to Shri Krishna while debating whether or not to fight the Kaurava army. One of the concerns was that he would incur sin if he killed his kinsmen. Having given the overview of the topic of Karmayoga, Shri Krishna wanted to now address Arjuna's concern around sin.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna told Arjuna that if one follows the path of Karmayoga, i.e. performs svadharma with equanimity, one doesn't have to constantly ponder whether an action will beget merit or sin. In fact, one goes beyond the accumulation of merit or sin. Why is that the case? If we begin to detach ourselves from the results or fruits of our actions, we will also not get attached to merit and sin. Both merit and sin, like results of an action, are future-oriented expectations, and have no place in Karmayoga.

For instance, consider a grapevine that produces grapes. It fully carries out its svadharma, which is to produce tasty grapes. But it is up to the one who processes the grapes to make grape juice out of those grapes, or to produce alcohol that probably ends up ruining an alcoholic's family. The grapevine does not incur merit or sin, it simply performs its svadharma.

There is another important point in this shloka. Earlier, we came across the definition of yoga as "yoga is equanimity of mind during the performance of action". Now, Shri Krishna instructed Arjuna on another benefit of yoga. If one maintains equanimity of mind at all times, one's actions become perfect since they will be performed with total attention and dexterity, without any distractions. Therefore, there is no need worry about the result. The result will, without question, be beneficial.

Earlier, we had discussed trying Karmayoga using a simple exercise: washing dishes while giving complete and undivided attention to the

task at hand. If you tried it, you may have noticed that it is almost impossible to focus the mind on the task. The mind, much like a child, darts either into the future or into the past. For now, let's continue to practice Karmayoga by doing simple household chores like washing dishes, but with focused attention. In the forthcoming shlokas, we will encounter more tools to bring equanimity to the mind.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 51, Chapter 2

*karmajam buddhiyukta hi phalam tyaktvaa maneeshinaha |
janmabandhavinirmuktaahaa padam gacchantyanaamayam || 51 ||*

karmajam : of action
buddhiyuktaha : with equanimity
hi : thus
phalam : result
tyaktvaa : give up
maneeshinaha : wise individual
janmabandhavinirmuktaahaa : liberated
from entanglements of birth
padam : state
gacchanti : attains
anaamayam : immaculate

Thus, the wise individual who performs actions with equanimity is liberated from the entanglements of birth, and attains the immaculate state.

With this shloka, Shri Krishna concludes the introduction to Karmayoga in this chapter. Here, he tells us that one who continually practices Karmayoga frees himself from the entanglements of birth. Let's look at this in more detail.

Our experience tells us that desires are never ending. Most material desires, once fulfilled, give rise to new ones. For instance, most immigrants to a country such as the US usually arrive with modest means. They rent a flat till they know where they plan to settle long term. And then the desires begin to manifest.

In a few years they take out a loan to buy a house. A house usually has a lawn. So you need a lawnmower, a leafblower, fertilizer, sprinkler system and so on to take care of the lawn. In addition, you need a car to get around. In time, one car is not enough - you need two. And since the neighbour has a Mercedes, you need to get one as well. Similarly with a TV - you start with 32 inch, then 60 inch, then 3D capability, home theatre system etc. Each desire, once fulfilled, gives birth to a new one.

So the shloka here says that this endless cycle of desire after desire entangles us in the material world. And therefore, one uses the discipline of Karmayoga to break out of it so that you reach that state where there are no desires or blemishes in one's personality - what is termed here as the immaculate state.

Let's summarize the key points of Karmayoga that we have seen in this chapter. Karmayoga is the performance of actions with equanimity of mind. We also looked at a 3-step toolkit to implement Karmayoga in our lives:

1. Reduce unnecessary thoughts of material objects that do not pertain to our svadharma

2. Improve quality of necessary thoughts by removing extreme attachment and hatred
3. Perform actions focusing on the present moment, without attachment to the result of action

Bhagavad Gita Verse 52, Chapter 2

yada te mohakalilam buddhirvyatitarishyati |
tadaa gantaasi nirvedam shrotavyasya shrutasya cha || 52 ||

When your intellect has completely crossed over the quagmire of delusion, then you will become indifferent to what has been heard and what is to be heard.

* *

yada : when
te : you
moha : delusion
kalilam : quagmire
buddhih : intellect
vyatitarishyati : completely crossed
tadaa : then
gantaasi : attain
nirvedam : indifference
shrotavyasya : what is to be heard
shrutasya : what has been heard
cha : and

When your intellect has completely crossed over the quagmire of delusion, then you will become indifferent to what has been heard and what is to be heard.<i>

As we saw in the last shloka, Shri Krishna concluded the introduction to Karmayoga. Now in this shloka and the next, he offers us pointers to assess whether we are progressing on the spiritual path or not. He mentions that one who is always established in equanimity becomes indifferent to hearing about any topic. But that is just the literal meaning. Here it also refers to seeing, touching, feeling and smelling, i.e. any object perceived through our senses.

Let's look at this in more detail. Also note that if we have gone through similar situations already in our lives, so this should not be something unknown to us.

Growing up as a teenager in the 1990s, WWF wrestling was considered a phenomenon. We would watch it diligently when it came on TV, read about it in magazines, and discuss it among friends non stop. But as we grew up we realized that it was staged entertainment, and not a real sport. And in time, like many other things, we outgrew the fascination for it. So now as adults when we see WWF on TV, we just change the channel and don't even think twice about it. We have become indifferent to WWF.

Now a wonderful poetic phrase - quagmire of delusion - is used here. What exactly is moha or delusion? In case of the WWF, we were under the delusion that WWF would give us happiness. But more broadly, moha refers to the error of pursuing of the material world as a source of happiness, as opposed to realizing the eternal essence. Therefore, as one practices equanimity and moves ahead on the spiritual path, the material world slowly loses appeal.

So as you begin to practice equanimity through performance of svadharma, try to keep track of your attachment to material objects. You will begin to observe that slowly, your attraction to the material world will start to weaken. This state of ultimate indifference to the material world is the state of "param vairagya" or ultimate indifference.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 53, Chapter 2

*shrutivipratipanna te yada sthaasyati nishchalaā |
samaadhaavachalaā buddhistadaā yogamavaapsyasi || 53 ||*

shruti : what is heard
vipratipanna : confused
te : your
yada : when
sthaasyati : will become
nishchalaā : steady
samaadhau : in equanimity
achala : grounded
buddhih : intellect
tadaā : then
yoga : yoga
avaapsyasi : attain

When your intellect, confused by what is heard, remains steady and stays grounded in equanimity, then you shall attain yoga.

The last shloka described an advanced stage of yoga, in other words, a state of equanimity, where we begin to slowly lose interest in material objects. In this shloka, Shri Krishna indicates the final stage of yoga where the intellect never loses its grounding.

In the initial stages of our spiritual journey, we will begin to experience moments of equanimity. These moments will be short and fleeting, but that is ok. As we continue to practice equanimity, these moments will grow longer and become more frequent. But there is always something - a thought from the past, a critical statement uttered by a friend, an object that we crave - that takes us out of equanimity and back into the world of moha.

So what should we aim for? We should aim for something better. Here's an example. When the internet was new, most of us connected to it using a dial-up modem. Each time we needed to access the internet, we had to establish a connection, and then disconnect it once done. As technology improved, we began to connect through it via cable or DSL connections. These connections are "always on", so there was no need to connect and disconnect everytime. Now no one wants to ever go back to using dial up modems.

So therefore, this shloka gives us a picture of the most advanced state of yoga where one is always in a state of equanimity, no matter what the circumstance. And when this happens, we will be always connected to the imperceptible, incomprehensible eternal essence. This is the only way to attain the eternal essence. When that happens, this state is called "samaadhi", which will be the culmination of one's spiritual journey.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 54, Chapter 2**Arjuna uvaacha:*

*sthitaprajnasya kaa bhaashaa samaadhisthasya keshava |
sthitadheeh kim prabhaasheta kimaaseeta vrajeta kim || 54 ||*

sthitaprajnasya : person of steady wisdom
kaa bhaashaa : what is the description
samaadhisthasya : established in equanimity
keshava : O Keshava
sthitadheeh : person of steady intellect
kim prabhaasheta : how does he speak
kimaaseeta : how does he sit
vrajeta kim : how does he walk

Arjuna said: What is the description of a person of steady wisdom, one who is established in equanimity, O Arjuna? How does that person of steady intellect speak? How does he sit? How does he walk?

In this shloka, we get to hear Arjuna speak after a long time. When we saw him last, he was in the midst of a panic attack. The extremely thoughtful question posed by him tells us that his mind has now calmed down, and that he has been following the teaching diligently. He now asks Shri Krishna to elaborate on the practical aspect of the teaching, since more time was spent on the theoretical part.

Arjuna was a warrior, and a very practical person. So he was less interested in abstract theoretical concepts. He wanted to know about the internal and external characteristics of a person who was steeped in equanimity. For a warrior, one of the best ways to learn to use a new weapon is to mimic someone who is skilled at using it. Therefore, Arjuna wanted to know how he could emulate that person who is always established in equanimity, here called a "sthitaprajna" or a person of steady wisdom.

The second half of the shloka contains questions that seem a bit odd to us. Why would Arjuna want to know how someone speaks, sits or walks? These questions are not meant to be taken literally. Speaking and walking refer to how an individual transacts in this world. Sitting refers to what is his perspective and attitude towards the world. That's what Arjuna wanted to know.

Let us take stock of where we are. We had seen that Shri Krishna was covering 4 main topics: 1) Informing Arjuna that his logic and reasoning was incorrect 2) Explaining the correct logic and reasoning to Arjuna 3) Providing practical guidance to implement this correct logic and reasoning 4) Describing the attributes of the individual who follows this teaching.

In the next shloka, Shri Krishna moves from the third topic to the final topic, which is the description of the person with steady wisdom.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 55, Chapter 2**Shri Bhagavaan uvaacha:**prajahaati yadaa kaamaansarvaanpaartha manogataan |
aatmanyevaatamanaa tushthah sthitaprajnastadocchyate || 55 ||*

prajahaati : gives up
 yadaa : when
 kaamaan : desires
 sarvaan : all
 paartha : O Paartha
 manogataan : that enter the mind
 aatmanaaa : self
 eva : only
 aatmani : by his own self
 tushthah : self-satisfied
 sthitaprajna : person of steady wisdom
 tada : then
 ucchyate : called

Shri Bhagavaan said: When an individual gives up all desires that enter the mind, O Paartha, and is self-satisfied in his own self, that individual is called a person of steady wisdom.

Just before entering a forest when hiking, there usually are signs posted at the entrance that say "beware of these poisonous plants". Similarly, from this shloka onwards, Shri Krishna lists all the factors that can destabilize our state of equanimity. If we keep track of these factors, and remain alert and aware when we encounter them, then we will never lose our mental balance and equanimity. This portion of the chapter is a very practical summary of the entire teaching of the Gita.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna advises us to monitor our material desires, i.e. track how many are arising, how many we have fulfilled, and so on. As we saw earlier, continual harbouring of material desires has the effect of destabilizing our mental balance, and takes us further away from state of equanimity. Therefore, a man of steady wisdom is one who has learned to give up all such desires.

Now this is especially true when we have predisposition to some object, situation or person. This predisposition is also known as "vaasana". Predispositions are the seeds of thought and desire. For instance, let's say we have a sweet tooth. Then, anytime we see a piece of chocolate, that desire will enter the mind, and we will begin thinking of how we can acquire that chocolate. If we are performing some work, the constant thinking of the chocolate will destabilize our mind and prevent us from focusing on the task at hand. So this shloka asks us to closely examine our predispositions as well as our desires.

Since this person of steady wisdom has extinguished all his desires, he is always content and does not need to rush out into the world of material objects. This is because he has realized his association with the eternal essence, which pervades the entire universe and therefore is always complete and content. Therefore, he will be "self-satisfied in his own self", as this shloka points out.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 56, Chapter 2

*duhkeshvanudvignamanaah sukheshu vigatspruhah |
veetaraagabhayakrodaha sthitadheermuniruchyate || 56 ||*

duhkeshu : in sorrow
anudvignamanaah : mind is not agitated
sukheshu : in joy
vigatspruhah: indifferent
sthitadheeh : person of steady intellect
munih : contemplative person
uchyate : called

One whose mind is not agitated in sorrow, and remains indifferent in joy, and is free from attachment, fear and anger; that contemplative individual is known as a person of steady intellect.

Shri Krishna continues giving us factors that can destabilize our state of equanimity. In this shloka, he says that the person of steady intellect does not let joy or sorrow upset his equanimity. Now does that mean that the person becomes a stone? No. As long as we are alive, it is natural to experience joy and sorrow. But if we notice that any joyful or sorrowful situation has upset our equanimity for a prolonged period of time, we should be on guard. There usually is an underlying selfish desire at work.

For instance, if you know that your favourite dish was planned to be cooked for dinner, but is no longer being cooked because of some reason, you will get disappointed. But if this disappointment persists for a long period of time, it means that you have a deep-seated desire for that dish, which can resurface anytime to cause you further agitation. The goal pointed out in the prior shloka is to free ourselves of as many material desires as possible, and to be "self satisfied with one's self".

The second part of the shloka goes deeper into this point by describing how a desire can give rise to fear and anger, both of which cause instability of mind. At the time of writing this, it is the thanksgiving holiday, so it is apt to look at a shopping example. Let's say that you go window shopping and see an ipod that is on sale with a huge discount. Later, you head home but all you can think about is that ipod. That's all it takes - you have developed attachment to it.

But that's not all. Right there, you will also develop a fear that it may go out of stock tomorrow, and that you will lose the deal. So you go to the store to buy it the very next day. Now, after a couple of days it stops working. You call the tech support phone number and are kept on hold for 20 minutes. What do you think has arisen in your mind? Anger, of course. And all it took was a desire to take hold of your mind when you saw the ipod. In later shlokas, Shri Krishna gives a

Notes

1. In the example, the individual imagined that the ipod, which is nothing but a material object, would give him happiness. Whereas in reality, there is no happiness "built into" the ipod. This projection of happiness onto a material object is termed as "shobhana adhyasa".

more detailed, step by step breakdown of how a simple little thought can bring about one's downfall.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 57, Chapter 2

*yah sarvatraanabhisnehastattatpraapya shubhaashubham |
naabhinandanti na dveshti tasya prajna pratishthitaa || 57 ||*

yah : he who
sarvatra : everywhere
anabhisneha : without affection
tat tat : those
praapya : receive
shubha : gain
ashubham : loss
na : not
abhinandanti : elated
dveshti : dejected
tasya : his
prajna : wisdom
pratishthitaa : steady

He who remains without affection everywhere, is not elated in gain, and is not dejected in loss, his wisdom is steady.

In the prior shloka, we saw how a person of steady wisdom responds to joyful and sorrowful situations that he encounters in life. In this shloka, Shri Krishna points out how that person responds to beneficial and adverse outcomes of his expectations.

This shloka uses an interesting word "anabhisneha", which means without affection. The root of this word is "sniha" which means "to stick". Most of us tend to get stuck to objects, people and situations that we encounter in our lives. And it is that stickiness which gets us into trouble.

An example from the corporate world would be a consultant who is hired for a 3 month assignment verses a full time employee who is given a similar assignment. The consultant comes in, does what she is supposed to do, submits her report and moves on to the next assignment, without getting entangled in office politics. Whereas the employee gets "stuck" to the job and gets entangled in all kinds of office politics, who he should align himself with, etc.

So therefore, if one remains unattached and works towards a goal, he gains the objectivity to remain the same whether he succeeds or fails in accomplishing that goal. He knows that he was there before that success or failure happened, he was there during it, and he will be there after it as well. Therefore whatever happened can be easily dealt with. In no way does he let any adverse outcome demotivate him.

How can we apply this practically? For example, if we worked hard for a project and someone criticizes us, internally we should remain steady and evaluate whether the criticism is valid or mean-spirited. If it is valid, we take the feedback positively. If it is mean-spirited, we ignore it. But if we are too attached to the work, we will lose our equanimity each time someone criticizes us.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 58, Chapter 2

*yada samharate chaayam koormangaaneeva sarvashaha |
indriyaanindriyaarthabhyastasya prajna pratishtitaa || 58 ||*

When, just like a tortoise withdraws its limbs from all sides, he withdraws his senses from objects, his intellect is steady.

So far, Shri Krishna gave us a checklist of factors that could disturb our equanimity: joy, sorrow, gain and loss. Let's say, we detect that one of these factors has presented itself to us. What should we do? He gives a beautiful example from the world of nature to address this point.

Whenever a tortoise senses danger, he withdraws his limbs into his shell. The shell is strong enough to withstand any adverse situation. And once that situation passes, he brings his limbs back into the world. Similarly, if we detect that an object, person or situation is about to disturb our equanimity, Shri Krishna advises us to bring our intellect into the picture, and completely withdraw our attention from that object, person or situation.

In one commentary on this topic, we learn that most animals have one sense organ as their weakness. The deer has sound, the elephant has touch, the moth has sight (fire), the fish has taste, and the bee has smell as its weakness. So for example, if a moth sees fire, it loses all control and flies straight into the fire. However, human beings have all five senses as their weakness, making this technique all the more important.

The most practical application of this technique is dieting. If we have a sweet tooth like we saw earlier, and we see a large slice of black forest chocolate cake in front of us, we have to apply the "tortoise technique" and move some steps away from that cake. It also means that we do not keep large stocks of chocolates, cakes etc. in our house because we may be tempted very easily.

Here's another related point. In India, many aspects of spiritual practices are embedded in our customs, but sometimes we do not realize their significance. We may have noticed a sculpture of a tortoise outside many Indian temples, which is an instruction to withdraw our worldly matters and enter the temple with a devotional mindset. But

yada : when
samharate : withdraws
cha : also
ayam : he
koormah : tortoise
angaani : limbs
iva : like
sarvashaha : all sides
indriyaani : senses
indriyaarthabhyaha : sense objects
tasya : his
prajna : intellect
pratishtitaa : steady

Notes

1. The example on 5 animals and their weaknesses is from Vivekachoodamani by Adi Shankaracharya

instead of doing so, we tend to whisper about worldly matters into the tortoise's ear, which is exactly the opposite of the original intent.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 59, Chapter 2

*vishayaa vinivartante niraahaarasya dehinaha |
rasavarjam rasopyasya param drishtvaa nivartate || 59 ||*

vinivartante : turn away
niraahaarasya : fasting
dehinaha : individual
rasavarjam : except taste
rasah : taste
api : also
asya : for this individual
param : absolute
drishtvaa : realized
nivartate : turn away

Objects turn away from the fasting individual, but their taste remains. For the individual who has realized the absolute, the taste also turns away.

In the last shloka, we encountered the "tortoise technique" which taught us how to guard ourselves when we encounter factors that can cause us agitation. It does work assuming we remain aware and alert about our thoughts. But if we have strong predispositions or vaasanaas towards any object, person or situation, the memory or "taste" of that factor will keep popping up in our mind. So in this shloka, Shri Krishna provides an overview of how one begins to address the removal of deep rooted predispositions, which is one of the primary goals of any spiritual teaching.

Let's go back to the black forest chocolate cake example from last time. You saw a piece of cake, you realized that you may succumb to it, and you took a few steps back. But a little later, the taste of that cake from a prior experience will pop up in your mind and begin to torment you. All you can think of for a while will be cake. This is what makes dieting difficult. Our mind keeps pushing us towards food each time we try to restrain ourselves.

So what is the solution? In the shloka, Shri Krishna says that the taste also turns away when we "realize the absolute". What he means is that we need to set our goal on something higher than ourselves, and hold on to that goal throughout our life. The higher the goal, the greater chance that we will get rid of our predispositions.

When we begin any diet, we typically set a goal, e.g. "I have to lose 2 kg in 3 weeks". Now, with this shloka in mind, we could try to set a higher goal, which could be "I need to lose this weight so that I can stay healthy to take care of my family". Or it could be "I need to lose this weight so that I can fulfill my svadharma in the best possible manner".

In later chapters, the Gita goes into great detail as to how we can gradually set higher and higher goals and ultimately set the highest

goal, the "absolute" goal mentioned in this shloka, so that we can burn away all of our predispositions.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 60, Chapter 2

*yatato hyaapi kaunteya purushasya vipaschitaha |
indriyaani pramaatheeni haranti prasabham manaha || 60 ||*

yatatah : persevere
hi : for
api : even
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
purushasya : individual
vipaschitaha : wise
indriyaani : senses
pramaatheeni : turbulent
haranti : seize
prasabham : forcibly
manaha : mind

For the senses are so turbulent, O Kaunteya, that they forcibly seize the mind of a even a wise individual who perseveres.

Earlier, we saw that if we have predispositions to objects, they will result in thoughts popping up in our mind. This will be true even if we are not near those objects. Some of us may raise an objection to this statement. We may ask: "As long as I control my actions, what difference does it make if I think about an object such as a chocolate cake? It won't matter because I won't eat it, Correct?"

In this shloka, Shri Krishna responds to the objection. He says that thoughts can catch us at a time of weakness, when we are least alert, and undo all of our self control. These thoughts are generated by our predispositions or vasanaas.

Vasanaas are like dormant embers of coal that burn stronger when the senses add fuel to their fire. They are the seeds of thoughts, or "thought generators". This means that self control of actions is effective, but only to a certain extent, because self control does not tackle vasanaas. It is like trimming a weed instead of uprooting it completely.

Another aspect is pointed out here. One may practice conquering one's senses for a long time. That person can become an advanced practitioner through years of diligence and perseverance. He may come to the conclusion that all of his desires and vasanaas have been vanquished. But the senses and the mind are extremely clever; they will wait for months, even years, and then generate a thought that can destabilize his equanimity in a second.

In summary, it is not enough to control our actions in order to maintain equanimity, we have to remain alert and watch our thoughts as well.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 61, Chapter 2

*taani sarvaani samyamya yukta aaseeta matparaha |
vashe hi yasyendriyaani tasya prajna pratishthitaa || 61 ||*

The disciplined individual should restrain them all and sit with devotion to me. Having brought the senses under control, his wisdom is steady.

Shri Krishna begins to go deeper into the subject of how senses and thoughts impact our lives. This subject comes under the umbrella of the "sthitaprajna lakshana", or the signs of a wise individual, and comprises the final portion of the second chapter. As a reminder, the four major portions of the second chapter are : 1) Shri Krishna convincing Arjuna that his logic was incorrect 2) providing the correct logic and understanding to Arjuna 3) providing the practical aspects of the teaching 4) describing the attributes of the man of steady wisdom. We are the the final topic right now.

In the last shloka, Shri Krishna described how the turbulent senses can ruin the mind. In this shloka, he provides a prescription to remedy the impact of the senses: set a goal that is higher than yourself, and channel your mind and your senses towards that higher goal. The senses, along with the mind, will detach from material objects only when they are shown a higher goal. They cannot detach without attaching themselves to a higher goal. Otherwise, we end up forcibly suppressing the senses, which we all know is not healthy.

This shloka also hints at the topic of meditation, which is a disciplined technique of fixing the mind to a higher goal. In meditation, an individual sits and gradually brings attention to one and only one thought. And that thought is nothing but the higher goal that we have set for ourself. The most unique thing in this shloka is that Shri Krishna uses the word "me", in other words, he asks us to make him the higher goal.

Now, at this stage in the spiritual journey, if you feel comfortable with making devotion to Shri Krishna your ultimate goal, that is fine. Otherwise, you can set any selfless goal that is greater than you - for example, serving your parents, serving your family, serving your organization, serving the country etc.

Setting a higher goal is the only way that your senses and your mind

taani : those
sarvaani : all
samyamya : restrain
yuktah : the disciplined individual
aaseeta : sit
mat : me
paraha : devoted
vashe : control
hi : for
yasya : those whose
indriyaani : senses
tasya : his
prajna : wisdom
pratishthitaa : steady

will come under control. It also ensures that your ego does not puff up thinking that it has controlled the senses.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 62-63, Chapter 2

dhyayato vishayaanpumsaha sangasteshoopajaayate |
 sangaatsanjaayate kaamaha kaamaatkrodhbhijaayate || 62 ||
 krodhaadbhavati sammohah sammohaatsmritivibhramaha |
 smritibhramshaad buddhinaasho buddhinaashaatpranashyati || 63 ||

When a man constantly thinks about objects, attachment for those objects arises. From attachment is born desire, and from desire is born anger. From anger comes delusion, from delusion comes loss of memory, from loss of memory comes destruction of intellect, and once the intellect is destroyed, he perishes.

dhyayataha : thinking

vishayaan : objects

pumsaha : individual

sangah : attachment

teshu : to those

upajaayate : is born

sangaat : from attachment

sanjaayate : is born

kaamaha : desire

kaamaat : from desire

krodhah : anger

abhijaayate : is born

krodhaat : when anger arises

bhavati : happens

sammohah : delusion

sammohaat : from delusion

smritivibhramaha : loss of memory

smritibhramshaad : from loss of memory

buddhinaasho : destruction of intellect

buddhinaashaat : from destruction of intellect

pranashyati : he perishes

Earlier, Shri Krishna touched upon the topic of continually thinking about material objects when we do not contact them physically. In this shloka, he goes into great detail as to why it is to be avoided. These two shlokas are sometimes referred to as the "ladder of fall". They illustrate how one simple thought can lead to the downfall of an individual.

Here is the entire sequence of events as mentioned in the 2 shlokas:

Constant thinking of material objects -> attachment -> desire -> anger -> delusion -> loss of memory -> destruction of intellect -> individual perishes.

dhyayataha : thinking
 vishayaan : objects
 pumsaha : individual
 sangah : attachment
 teshu : to those
 upajaayate : is born
 sangaat : from attachment
 sanjaayate : is born
 kaamaha : desire
 kaamaat : from desire
 krodhah : anger
 abhijaayate : is born
 krodhaat : when anger arises
 bhavati : happens
 sammohah : delusion
 sammohaat : from delusion
 smritivibhramaha : loss of memory
 smritibhramshaad : from loss of memory
 buddhinaasho : destruction of intellect
 buddhinaashaat : from destruction of intellect
 pranashyati : he perishes

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Let's first examine the sequence of events from constant thinking all the way upto desire using the Ipod example from earlier :

A person has thoughts about ipod on sale -> gets attached to that ipod deal -> desire to buy ipod on sale is created.

Now, at this point, he has purchased the Ipod and is extremely attached to it. Even without going forward in the sequence, we can see that the material desire to procure an Ipod has taken the person away from performing his svadharma. His equanimity has already been disturbed. He is dragged back into the material world, and has taken one step backwards from moksha or freedom.

Let's move forward in the sequence:

Ipod breaks down -> he is angry that it has broken down -> he completely loses his equanimity -> takes anger out on his wife -> family environment is agitated.

Here, not only has he completely lost his equanimity, but has also caused pain to other members of his family. So the message here is that constant pondering and thinking about objects eventually leads to moving away from equanimity, hence it is to be avoided, or at least minimized to the extent possible.

An interesting point seen here is around anger. Per the shlokas, anger

is caused when one's desire gets obstructed. Also, attachment to a concept such as one's job title or position causes continual waves of thought, anger and delusion, in other words, stress. Therefore, these shlokas provide an ancient but relevant analysis of anger and stress.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 64-65, Chapter 2

*raagadveshaviyuktaistu vishayaanindrayaishcharan |
aatmavashyairvidheyaatmaa prasaadamadhigachati || 64 ||
prasaade sarvaduhkhaanaam haanirasyopajaayate |
prasannachetaso hyaashu buddhih paryavatishtate || 65 ||*

But, the one whose mind and senses are under control, is devoid of attraction or revulsion. He moves around objects and gains the state of tranquility. Having gained tranquility, all of his sorrows are destroyed. His mind is joyful and his intellect soon becomes steady.

In the last shloka, Shri Krishna explained the "ladder of fall", or how constant thinking about material objects leads to a fall from equanimity. In this set of shlokas, he explains the exact opposite scenario, where bringing the senses and the mind under control brings us to a state of happiness. Here's the sequence of events:

Bring senses and mind under control -> one becomes devoid of attraction and revulsion -> he can experience the material world without any problem -> his mind becomes tranquil -> his intellect becomes steady -> he has no more sorrow -> he attains the state of happiness.

So, if one continues to pursue one's svadharma, and stay devoted to a higher ideal, one gets to a stage of equanimity. We have learned this in earlier shlokas. But then, what next? This set of shlokas tells us that performance of svadharma has a purifying effect - it is like a flame that burns away our vasanaas. As the vasanaas burn away, our minds remain situated in equanimity - and that's when our sorrows diminish.

We are always looking at quick fixes to be happy - new job, new friends, read a new book, move to a new place etc. But what comes across in these shlokas is that a long-term state of happiness cannot be found in a quick fix solution. All we can do is follow our svadharma, fix a higher goal, and keep at it.

raagadvesha-viyuktaih : devoid of attraction or revulsion
tu : but
vishayaan : objects
indrayaih : through senses
charan : moves around
aatmavashyaih : subdued
vidheyaatmaa : one with a controlled mind
prasaadam : tranquility
adhigachati : gains
prasaade : gaining tranquility
sarva-duhkhaanaam : all sorrows
haanir : destroy
asya : of this individual
upajaayate : become
prasanna-chetasah : joyful mind
hi : surely
aashu : soon
buddhih : intellect
pari-avatishtate : steady

Bhagavad Gita Verse 66, Chapter 2

*naasti buddhiryuktasya na chaayuktasya bhaavana |
na chaabhaavayataha shaantirashaantasya kutaha sukham || 66 ||*

The individual whose mind and senses are not controlled cannot have a focused intellect, without a focused intellect he cannot meditate, and without meditation there is no peace. How can there be happiness without peace?

Shri Krishna so far extolled the virtues of controlling the senses and the mind. In this shloka, he echoes the same point, but uses negative inference to drive it home.

Here, he says that if the mind and senses constantly wander, our psyche is agitated. An agitated psyche will never allow an intellect to focus. And we have already seen in earlier shlokas the disadvantages of not having focused intellect or "vyavasaayaatmika buddhi". One cannot hold on to a single thought, in other words - meditate, if the mind is turbulent.

We may feel that there is some repetition here - why is he asking us to control the mind and senses over and over again? But consider this: reading about it and putting it into practice are two different things. If we check the daily list of thoughts that we maintain in our diary, we realize that even if we read the Gita backwards and forwards, it takes lot of time and effort to change the quality and quantity of our thoughts. This message needs to be seared into our brain for us to take it seriously, hence the refrain of this point.

Very simply put: there is no happiness without control of mind and senses.

na : not
asti : happen
buddhih : focused intellect
ayuktasya : one whose mind and senses
are not controlled
na : not
cha : and
ayuktasya : that individual
bhaavana : meditation
na : not
cha : and
abhaavayataha : without meditation
shaantih : peace
ashaantasya : individual without peace
kutaha : where
sukham : happy

Bhagavad Gita Verse 67, Chapter 2

*indriyaanaam hi charataam yanmanuvidheeyate |
tadasya harati prajnyaam vaayurnaavamivaambhasi || 67 ||*

For, even one of the wandering senses overpowers the mind and steals away wisdom, like wind affects a ship in water.

A picture is worth a thousand words. So here, just like Shri Krishna painted a picture of the tortoise earlier, he uses another picture to portray an important point - that just one sense organ has the ability to destroy us. He gives us the example of a rudderless ship at sea. It will go wherever the wind takes it, and in time, eventually be destroyed.

In the same way, just one sense organ - the eye seeing something tempting, the ear hearing some gossip, the tongue tasting alcohol - one sense organ can bring the mind under submission. In doing so, it can take away the intellect's capacity to function. And worse still, this whole chain of events can happen in a fraction of a second, and we won't even know it has happened unless we are eternally aware and alert.

We are nearing the end of the section on the signs of the individual of steady wisdom, and are a few shlokas away from concluding the second chapter.

indriyaanaam : among the senses
hi : for
charataam : wandering
yat : the one that
manah : mind
anuvidheeyate : submitted
tat : that
asya : this
harati : steals
prajnyaam : wisdom
vaayuh : wind
naavam : ship
iva : like
ambhasi : water

Bhagavad Gita Verse 68, Chapter 2

*tasmaadyasya mahaabaaho nigriheetaani sarvashaha |
indriyaaneendriyaarthebhyastasya prajnya pratishtithaa || 68 ||*

Therefore, O mighty armed warrior, one who always restrains his senses from objects, his wisdom his steady.

tasmaad : therefore
yasya : that individual
mahaabaaho : O mighty armed warrior
nigriheetaani : under control
sarvashaha : everywhere
indriyaani : senses
indriyaarthebhyaha : objects
tasya : that individual
prajnya : wisdom
pratishtithaa : steady

With this shloka, Shri Krishna concludes the topic of sense restraint. Let us summarize the main points of this topic.

The senses have the power to destabilize the mind, and consequently, destroy the intellect's capability to make proper judgements. The best way to control the senses is to practice one's svadharma with devotion to a higher ideal. If we don't, then even a stray thought about a material object will escalate into a chain of events that will bring about our downfall.

Changing the quality and direction of thoughts towards a higher ideal will result in a tranquil psyche, enabling us to move in the world of material objects without attachment or revulsion. And ultimately, this will result in peace and happiness.

A pictorial description of this topic was provided in the form of a rudderless ship at sea, that is blown here and there by wind. The wind represents the senses, the ship our mind, and the direction, our wisdom.

In the next shloka, Shri Krishna begins to conclude the second chapter of the Gita.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 69, Chapter 2

*yaa nishaa sarvabhootaanaam tasyaam jaagarti samyami |
yasyaam jaagrati bhootaani saa nishaa pashyato muneh || 69 ||*

yaa : that
nishaa : night
sarvabhootaanaam : for all beings
tasyaam : in that
jaagarti : is awake
samyami : balanced individual
yasyaam : and that
jaagrati : are awake
bhootaani : all beings
saa : that
nishaa : night
pashyato : views
muneh : person of contemplation

That which is night for all beings, the balanced individual is awake in that. And that in which all beings are awake, the person of contemplation views as night.

Here we encounter one of the most poetic shlokas in the second chapter, again, having several layers of meaning. Let us try to understand it to the best of our ability. First, let's consider an example that will make the understanding of this shloka easier.

When a lay person and a professional artist enter a museum, both of them find joy in appreciating the works of art. The lay person may get excited about seeing how accurately an artist has painted a portrait. But the professional artist may find joy in more subtler aspects of the very same painting, e.g. what brush strokes were used, which time period was the painting commissioned in, what were the influences and so on - aspects that the lay person is probably totally oblivious to.

So therefore, in this shloka, Shri Krishna is speaking about two groups of individuals: ones who maintain the state of equanimity and ones who don't. Both groups have to live in this world of material objects, and both of them have to face ups and downs in life. The key difference in both groups is their vision.

For most individuals, the world of material objects is their end goal, they are "awake" to it, and the eternal essence is like night to them. But for the individuals of equanimity, the world of material objects loses importance - that world is like night to them. They are awake to the timeless, changeless eternal essence.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 70, Chapter 2

*aapuryamaanamachalapratishtham
 samudraamaapah pravishanti yadvat |
 tadvatkaamaa yam pravishanti sarve
 sa shaantimaapnoti na kaamakaamee || 70 ||*

Just like the ocean remains unmoved though water enters it from all sides, so does that (tranquil) individual attain peace in whom all desires enter, but not the "desirer of desires"

Here Shri Krishna provides another pictorial description of the individual of steady wisdom : a deep, large ocean that has many streams of water entering it. No matter how many streams enter the ocean, regardless of how gently or how forcefully they enter it, the ocean always remains calm and undisturbed.

In the same way, an individual of steady wisdom does not get impacted by any number of material objects or desires that he experiences. They fail to disturb his state of equanimity. Furthermore, even if the individual has to get angry in order to perform his svadharma in the material world, he is rooted in tranquility. And that is just like the ocean surface could experience stormy weather, but remain tranquil underneath the surface.

On the other hand, the person who is steeped in ignorance and does not possess wisdom will never attain peace. Here he is called the "desirer of desires". In other words, this person still thinks that harbouring and fulfilling desires will lead to peace and happiness. The fundamental shift from selfish desire oriented work to svadharma prompted work has not happened for him.

Note the change in meter to emphasize the point made in this shloka.

aapuryamaanam : filled with water
 from all sides
 achalapratishtham : unmoved
 samudram : ocean
 aapah : water
 pravishanti : enters
 yadvat : just like
 tadvat : so does
 kaamaah : desires
 yam : in that individual
 pravishanti: enter
 sah : that individual
 shaantim : peace
 aapnoti : attains
 na : not
 kaamakaamee : desirer of desires

Bhagavad Gita Verse 71 Chapter 2

*vihaaya kaamanyah sarvaanpumaanshcharati nihspruha |
nirmamo nirahankaarah sa shaantimadhigachhati || 71 ||*

That individual who walks having abandoned all desires, cravings, mine-ness and ego, he attains peace.

vihaaya : abandon
kaaman : desires
yah : who
sarvaan : all
pumaan : individual
charati : walks
nihspruha : without cravings
nirmamah : without mine-ness
nirahankaarah : without ego
sah : he
shaantim : peace
adhigachhati : attains

Earlier in the chapter, Arjuna asked Shri Krishna to point out the signs of a person of steady wisdom. To that end, he asked Shri Krishna to answer the following questions: how does he sit, speak and walk. In this shloka, hence the use of the word "charati" meaning "walks".

Shri Krishna summarizes the entire topic of the signs of a wise person in four points. He first asks us to give up selfish desires using the technique of karma yoga. Next, he asks us to give up cravings for things we already possess, which is the second point here. And to eliminate even the slightest trace of selfishness, he finally asks us to give up the sense of "I-ness" and "mine-ness" which we had seen in the first chapter, also known as "ahankaara" and "mamataa". The goal attained by giving up these four things is also repeated here for emphasis: it is everlasting peace.

As a point of clarification, let us remember that for most of us, abandoning these four things will not happen overnight. We have to follow a disciplined technique to do so, and only after having applied this technique for a period of time will be begin to see the desires, cravings, ego and mine-ness slowly lose their grip.

With this shloka, Shri Krishna concludes the final topic of the second chapter, that of the signs of a wise person. The next shloka will be the last shloka in the second chapter, a wonderful milestone in our journey.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 72, Chapter 2

*eshaa braahmee sthitih paartha nainaam praapya vimuhyati |
sthitvaasyaamantakaalepi brahmanirvaanamrichchati || 72 ||*

Having attained this state of brahman, O Paartha, one never gets deluded. If one gets established in this state even at the time of death, he attains oneness with brahman.

We encounter the word "brahman" in this shloka, which is the concluding shloka in the second chapter of the Gita. As a side note, this word is pronounced as "bruh-mun" and not "brah-mun".

So what exactly is this brahman? It is nothing but the eternal essence that Shri Krishna described in the earlier shlokas of this chapter. It is eternal, timeless, changeless, and pervades the entire universe. And when this abstract notion of the eternal essence takes a name and a form, it is known as Ishvara or God.

Therefore, if one follows the technique of karma yoga and attains the state of a person of steady wisdom or "stithaprajnya", that person attains oneness with brahman, or in other words, attains God. Also, even if we only attain this state at the time of death, we will still achieve oneness with brahman.

Shri Krishna concludes the second chapter of the Gita with this shloka. As we saw before, the second chapter contains the essence of the entire Gita. So, why should we read the next 16 chapters? Let us take up this question.

Shri Krishna has packed several lifetimes worth of instruction into the second chapter. Most of us will never get it just by reading the second chapter. So Shri Krishna has taken up each point in the second chapter and elaborated it further in the remainder of the Gita. He clarifies key points in the teaching, resolves seemingly conflicting statements, and makes everything practical and accessible to all kinds of readers.

Now, some of us would have approached the Gita to further our spiritual quest, and some of us with a very practical bent. We should not assume that the remainder of the Gita will only go deeper into the spiritual aspects. There are tons of practical lessons that will improve our daily lives and make us better human beings, even if we choose to

eshaa : this
braahmee :brahman
sthitih : state
paartha : O Paartha
enam : this
praapya : having obtained
vimuhyati : deluded
na : not
sthitvaa : established
asyaam : in this
antakaale : at the time of death
api : even
brahmanirvaanam : oneness with
brahman
richchati : attains

disregard the spiritual aspects of the Gita.

Having concluded the second chapter in our journey, we will summarize the main points of the second chapter and get a sense of what's coming ahead next.

om tatsatiti shreematbhagavatgitasupanishadsu brahmavidyaayaam yogashaastre shreekrishnaarjunsamvade saankhyayogo naama dvitiodhyaayaha
|| 2 ||

Summary Of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 2

Since the second chapter is said to contain the essence of the entire Gita, let's try to recap the main points before we move to the third chapter:

1. Shri Krishna points out the error in Arjuna's thinking, in that Arjuna's personality was shaken by grief and delusion towards his kinsmen
2. He advises Arjuna to correct the error by learning the knowledge of the eternal essence
3. He describes the means to attain the eternal essence
4. He also describes the characteristics of the individual who has realized the eternal essence.

We can summarize the technique to attain the eternal essence into 3 stages:

1. Attain steadfastness in selfless action by pursuing one's svadharma
2. Attain steadfastness in devotion to a higher ideal
3. Attain steadfastness in the knowledge of the eternal essence or tattva-jnyana

Notes

1. Most commentators agree that the chapters of the Gita map to the Upanishadic statement "Tat tvam asi" or "You are that". The first 6 chapters cover the "tvam" or the "you" aspect, the next 6 cover the "tat" or the "That" aspect", and the final 6 chapters cover the "asi" or the "are" aspect.



Karma Yoga

Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 3

*jyaayasee chetkarmanaste mataa buddhirjanaardana |
tatkim karmani ghore maam niyojayasi keshava || 1 ||*

jyaayasee : superior
chet : if
karmanaha : action
te : you
mataa : opinion
buddhih : knowledge
janaardana : O Janaardana
tat : then
kim : why
karmani : action
ghore : horrible
maam : me
niyojayasi : perform
keshava : O Keshava

If knowledge is superior to action in your opinion, O Janaardana, why do you want me to perform this horrible action, O Keshava?

We begin the third chapter with a question from Arjuna. It is wonderful to see the give-and-take between a student and a disciple come up several times in the Gita, making it more accessible and human. Let us dig deeper into Arjuna's question.

In the last chapter, Shri Krishna introduced the topic of karma yoga, where one performs selfless action. But later, he spoke about the knowledge of the eternal essence. Arjuna interpreted this as a statement that knowledge is superior to wisdom, and wanted to clarify whether it was so.

As an analogy, I remember the experience of learning music. In most cases, new students of music gave more importance to performing a popular song on stage, than to endure the rigour and discipline of daily finger drills that could get repetitive and boring. Similarly, Arjuna thought that knowledge was superior in action.

Arjuna also referred to his fighting in the war as a "horrible" action. This word speaks a lot about his mental state. Shri Krishna had taught him that one should maintain equanimity in pleasant and unpleasant situations. But Arjuna had not internalized and assimilated the teaching.

This is not uncommon. Our experience will usually indicate that a one-time hearing or "shravana" of any teaching will not be enough. We also need to reflect on the teaching, which is also known as "manana". And finally, we have to internalize it so that it becomes part of our personality - "nidhidhyaasana".

In the next shloka, Arjuna completes his question to Shri Krishna.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 3

*vyaamishreneva vaakyen buddhim mohayaseeva me |
tadekam vada nishchitya yena shreyohamaapnuyaam || 2 ||*

You are confusing my intellect with these mixed-up statements. Therefore, be certain and tell me that one statement by which I will attain the highest good.

vyaamishrena : mixed-up
iva : these
vaakyen : statements
buddhim : intellect
mohayasi : confusing
me : my
tat : that
ekam : one
vada : tell
nishchitya : having ascertained
yena : which will
shreyah : highest good
aham : me
aapnuyaam : attain

Arjuna concludes his question to Shri Krishna in this shloka. As we saw last time, Arjuna did not fully comprehend the teaching from the second chapter. Being a military man, one who is trained in issuing and receiving terse orders in battlefield, he needed clear and simple instructions. Shri Krishna's covered the entire essence of the Gita in the second chapter. So therefore, Arjuna asked Shri Krishna to reveal what was most appropriate for him at this point in time.

Let's refer to the student of music from the prior example. A student who starts his formal training in classical music usually attends a "classical music 101" course which covers topics such as the types of classical music, renowned composers and their compositions, the evolution of music through several centuries and so on. But, the teaching that is most beneficial to the beginner student is simple concepts like how to locate a note on the piano and so on.

The second chapter of the Gita is just like the classical music 101 course that covers lot of topics and techniques. With his mind bewildered by all that was heard, Arjuna asked Shri Krishna to provide the one technique that was most appropriate for Arjuna at this stage in his spiritual journey.

Shri Krishna understood Arjuna's situation and provided an answer in the next shloka.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 3**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:*

*lokesmindvidhaa nishthaa puraa proktaa mayaanagha |
 jnyaanayogena saankhyaanaam karmayogena yoginaam || 3 ||*

Shri Bhagavaan said: In this world, since time immemorial, I have created a two-fold path, O sinless one; the yoga of knowledge for contemplative individuals, and the yoga of action for yogis.

loke : world
 asmin : this
 dvividhaa : two-fold
 nishthaa : path
 puraa : since time immemorial
 proktaa : spoken
 mayaa : by me
 anagha : O sinless one
 jnyaanayogena : the yoga of knowledge
 saankhyaanaam : for contemplative individuals
 karmayogena : the yoga of action
 yoginaam : for yogis

Earlier, we saw that Arjuna wanted to know which of the two paths, i.e. the yoga of action and the yoga of knowledge, is superior. Shri Krishna addresses that question here. According to him, none of the two is either superior or inferior.

Sant Jnyaneshwar provides an example to show that none of these paths are superior or inferior: like a west-flowing river and an east-flowing river that both meet the same ocean, both paths are same.

Now, even though the paths are complementary, there is a subtle difference between them. Let us explore this difference. Consider a child who is in the first grade. Even if he wants to, he cannot jump straight to a masters degree. He would have to finish high school, then college, and only then will he be ready for his masters degree.

In the same way, most of us are at a stage in life where we are active and want to make a contribution to the world. For such yogis or active individuals, the path of action is the most appropriate. Once we reach a stage where we exhaust all of our desires, we can transcend the path of action to pursue the path of knowledge, just like we transcend college education to pursue our masters degree.

I used to know a classmate from school that was a math prodigy. He could solve advanced calculus equations in sixth grade. The teachers used to check with him whether they were teaching sixth grade math correctly, such was his prowess. He did not need to go through elementary math, he was ready for his math PhD even at that young age.

Similarly, there are a few rare individuals who are at an advanced stage of their spiritual journey. They have eliminated most of their desires. Only such rare contemplative individuals can directly pursue

the path of knowledge. For most of us, the path of action is the way to go. And karmayoga, or the path of action, is the main subject covered in this chapter.

On a different note, we see that Shri Krishna is hinting that he is something more than the cowherd son of Vasudeva here. We know this because he mentions that he himself has created this two-fold path for realizing the eternal essence. This has not slipped past Arjuna, he will ask this question at the right time.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 3

na karmanaamanaarmbhaannaishkarmyam purushoshrute |
na cha sannyasanaadeva siddhim samadhigacchati || 4 ||

na : neither
 karmanaam : action
 anaarmbhaat : not initiating
 naishkarmyam : actionlessness
 purushah : individual
 ashrote : attains
 na : nor
 cha : and
 sannyasanaat : renunciation of action
 eva : mere
 siddhim : perfection
 samadhigacchati : attain

Neither does an individual attain actionlessness by not initiating action, nor by mere renunciation does he attain perfection.

In the prior shloka, Shri Krishna dispelled Arjuna's notion that the yoga of knowledge was superior to the yoga of wisdom. But there was another aspect to Arjuna's question. He still was not convinced that he should fight the war, and was searching for pointers in Shri Krishna's teaching that supported his desire to give up all action and flee the war. We saw this in the first chapter where he went to the extent of suggesting that he become a monk. Shri Krishna wanted to address that issue in this shloka.

First, let us understand what is meant by the word "actionlessness" in this shloka. Like many words in scriptures, it is not meant to be taken literally. The word "actionlessness" points to the ultimate state of the "sthithaprajnya" from the previous chapter. In this state, the vaasanaas have been so thoroughly eliminated that all action becomes completely selfless. There is absolutely no trace of selfishness. The word "Siddhim" or the state of perfection in the second half of the shloka, also refers to this state.

So therefore, Shri Krishna warned Arjuna that "actionlessness" cannot be attained by not starting a new action, nor by giving up actions that have already started. It would be similar to cutting off a plant without plucking its roots. Until our vaasanaas have been completely eradicated, they will keep generating desires which will lead us to selfish actions. But once vasanaas have been eradicated, only selfless actions will remain.

Now, some of us who are not fully convinced by this argument could still say: "I will renounce all actions right now and move to a quiet solitary place. If I just sit still for a long time, my desires will automatically melt away". Shri Krishna addresses this point in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 3

*na hi kaschitkshanamapi jaatu tishthatyakarmakrita |
kaaryate hyaavashah karma sarvah prakritijairgunaih || 5 ||*

na : not
hi : for
kaschit : anyone
kshanamapi : for even a moment
jaatu : in any state
tishthati : stay
akarmakrita : without performing action
kaaryate : compels to act
avashah : helplessly
karma : action
sarvah : all beings
prakritijaih : born of prakriti
gunaih : gunaas

For no one can stay without performing action, even for a moment. All beings, helplessly, are compelled to act by the gunaas born of prakriti.

Imagine a huge forest untouched by man, like we see on the National Geographic channel. If we look at it superficially, we could conclude that there is nothing going on there. But if we pay close attention, we will begin to hear the chirping of the crickets, the babble of a brook, the fluttering of wings and so on.

Watching all the actions going on in the forest reminds us of a simple fact. It is the tendency of nature or "prakriti" to act continuously. It never stays action-less even for a moment. Even a rock that seems action-less is undergoing geological change that is visible only after thousands or millions of years.

Now lets shift our attention to the human body. It too, is constructed by nature. It is composed of substances derived from the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe, all products of nature. If our body is made of components born out of nature, wouldn't it also follow the tendency of nature towards continuous action?

Therefore, Shri Krishna informs us that all beings have no choice but to act, because all beings are made up of prakriti. He explains that prakriti is nothing but three gunaas - energies or forces that make up this entire universe. These three energies are: rajas which causes movement, tamas which causes inertia, and sattva which maintains harmony between movement and inertia. This topic is taken up in great detail in later chapters.

In this way, Shri Krishna addresses the question raised earlier: "Why can't I retire to the forest and cease all action?" We cannot, because the gunaas that we are made up are born out of nature, and nature never ceases to act continuously.

If this answer still does not satisfy us, let's try to sit still for three hours. Even if we somehow manage to physically sit still, our minds

will be racing with thoughts. And even the act of thinking is an action.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 6, Chapter 3

*karmendriyaani saiyamya ya aaste manasaa smaran |
indriyaarthaanvimoodhaatmaa mithyaachaarah sa ucchchyate || 6 ||*

saiyamya : forcibly restrain
yah : one who
aaste : sits
manasaa : in the mind
smaran : thinks
vimoodhaatmaa : foolish individual
mithyaachaarah : hypocrite
sah : that
ucchchyate : known as

One who sits, forcibly restraining his organs of action, yet keeps thinking about objects, that foolish individual is known as a hypocrite.

The second chapter of the Gita informed us that the way to achieve the ultimate spiritual goal is by eliminating our vaasanaas, because they are the source of selfish desires. But this message has the potential to be dangerous if it is misinterpreted.

Under the banner of becoming more spiritual, some people put their bodies through extreme fasting, while some forcibly repress their urges. We see a milder version of this behaviour when individuals are trying to rid themselves of addictions by simply cutting off the supply or going "cold-turkey".

For example, if one has an addiction to alcohol, one tries not to keep alcohol in the house to avoid temptation. That may work in the short term, but an addiction is not in the body, it is in the mind. It is like any other vasanaa and will come up as a desire when one sees alcohol the next time.

So in this shloka, Shri Krishna issues a strong warning to anyone who thinks that they can advance on the spiritual path through extreme repression of the body or of the mind. He uses a strong term to admonish such individuals by calling them hypocrites.

Let's connect this shloka to the previous one. It informed us that the body, mind and intellect comprise the three gunaas. These gunaas born of prakriti will always compel us to perform actions. But the current shloka tells us that repression of action will not lead to elimination of desires. We have no choice but to perform action, yet we need clear up our desires and vasanaas.

So what's the conclusion? We have to find a way to eliminate vasanaas WHILE we are performing actions. That technique is karma yoga.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 3

*yastvindriyaani manasaa niyamyaaarabhaterjuna |
karmendriyaih karmayogamasaktah sa vishishyate || 7 ||*

But one who controls his senses by his mind, O Arjuna, and performs karmayoga with his organs-of-action without attachment - that individual is superior.

In the previous shloka, we saw that repressing our urges and giving up actions does not work. A different approach is needed to clean our vasanaas and selfish desires. In this shloka, Shri Krishna says that we should not give up actions - instead, we should give up attachment.

Giving up attachment is a technique unto itself, and this chapter goes into a lot of detail on that topic. To begin with, this shloka informs us that we need to arm ourselves with two weapons: discrimination or "viveka", and dispassion or "vairagya".

Let first look at discrimination. If we have followed the teaching so far, we know that material objects are temporary and are not the true sources of happiness. But it is extremely easy to forget this teaching, especially if we have strong vasanaas and desires.

Therefore, we have to constantly arm ourselves with the weapon of discrimination by being always aware and alert about our thoughts and emotions. And we have to be especially alert when we are around objects that we are attached to. For a simple example take food: it could be chocolates for the sweet tooth person, fried food for the obese person etc.

Next comes dispassion. If we constantly practice discrimination, dispassion will happen automatically. Objects, people and situations will begin to lose their hold on us. Dispassion will prevent our energy from rushing out into the world of material objects through our senses. This is what the shloka means by the phrase "one who controls his senses by his mind."

Finally, once the mind has gained back control over the senses, then the energy that once rushed out through our senses can be channeled into performing karmayoga. The next shloka will go deeper into what Shri Krishna means by karmayoga.

yah : that
tu : but
indriyaani : senses
manasaa : by mind
niyamyaa : controls
aarabhate : follows
arjuna : O Arjuna
karmendriyaih : through organs-of-action
karmayogam : karma yoga
asaktah : without attachment
sa : that individual
vishishyate : is superior

Notes

1. Verse 375 of Shankaracharya's Vivekachoodamani speaks of dispassion and discrimination as "two wings of a bird" that lift the seeker into realization.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 3

*niyatam kuru karma tvam karma jyaayah hyakarmanaha |
shareerayaatraapi cha te na prasiddhyedakarmanaha || 8 ||*

niyatam : prescribed
kuru : perform
karma : actions
tvam : you
karma : action
jyaayah : superior
hi : since
akarmanaha : inaction
shareera-yaatraa : journey of the body
api : even
cha : also
te : your
akarmanaha : inaction

You should perform prescribed actions, since action is superior to inaction. Also, even the journey of the body cannot be accomplished through inaction.

Having covered the topic of why one should perform action, Shri Krishna now speaks about what kind of action should be performed. He urges Arjuna to only perform "niyatam" or prescribed actions. What does this term mean?

Scriptures classify actions into several categories. Let us look at the two main ones: "niyatam" or prescribed actions, and "nishiddha" or forbidden actions. Prescribed actions are those that are enjoined in the Vedas. But in today's context, we can interpret this as one's duties. These include performing one's svadharma, serving one's parents, family, and nation etc. Forbidden actions are the "thou shalt not" actions such as killing another being, stealing, cheating and so on. So here, Shri Krishna urges Arjuna to perform prescribed actions, but without any trace of attachment to the action or to the fruit.

Now one may say "I like to watch a movie and enjoy a good meal. Those do not seem like prescribed duties. How should we think about those?". Shri Krishna does not advocate repressing anything, as we saw earlier. But we should define boundaries to any action, as well as minimize attachment or selfish motive. The best way to do so is to share.

If you want to watch TV, watch it collectively with your family and friends. Or share your meal with them. Doing so will ensure that our previously self-serving actions lose any trace of selfishness or ego. The best example here is a mom that always cooks what the family members like, and puts her preferences on a lower priority.

In addition, Shri Krishna reiterates the notion that one should never resort to inaction, He says that if one does not act, one cannot even perform maintenance of one's body.

Our body is an important tool in our spiritual journey. Nowhere in

the Gita has Shri Krishna asked us to neglect it. In fact, here he is saying that one should absolutely perform action to maintain the body, including bathing it, feeding it, keeping it strong and fit, and going to the doctor if it is not working properly. It is an extremely practical teaching.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 9, Chapter 3

*yajnyarthakarmāṇyaṭra lokāya karmabandhanāḥ |
tadārtham karma kaunteya muktasangaḥ samaachara || 9 ||*

Other than those actions performed for yajna, this world gets bound by action. Therefore, O Kaunteya, perform actions in that regard, without attachment.

yajnyarthaat : done for yajna
karmanah : actions
anyatra : except
lokah : world
ayam : this
karmabandhanaha: gets bound by
action
tadartham : for that purpose
karma : actions
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
muktasangah : without attachment

samaachara : observing, practising

So far, Shri Krishna spoke about why performing action is essential, as well as what kind of action to perform. With this shloka, he begins the main topic of this chapter, which deals with how to perform actions. The second chapter mentioned it briefly, but this chapter goes deeper into it.

Shri Krishna uses the beautiful metaphor of a "yajna" to convey this teaching. In Indian culture, a yajna is a formal ritual of worship. Firstly, we fix a higher ideal before commencing a yajna, and dedicate the entire yajna to that ideal. Typically, that ideal is a "devataa" or a deity. Secondly, we perform actions such as chanting mantras and pouring oblations into the sacrificial fire, but do so with absolutely no trace of selfishness. Some mantras even include the words "naa mama" or "not me" to make unselfishness explicit.

So how does that ancient ritual apply to us? Let's look at a practical example. An accountant working for a corporation can be successful if she acts in the spirit of a yajna. She should set a higher ideal, e.g. "I dedicate myself to the success of this corporation". Then, she should perform her job responsibilities in the service of that goal. She will, for instance, frequently sign large cheques where there are opportunities to play games for selfish profit. But she will not even think about such things because her focus is on the company's well being, not hers.

Now let's see what happens when her goal becomes selfish. She will begin to do things that generate "conflict of interest" in corporate-speak. She may slowly divert some of the company money to a shell company owned by a friend and so on. From a worldly perspective, she will get kicked out of the company sooner or later. From a spiritual perspective, each selfish action will bind her, propelling her into further selfish desires, and away from self-realization.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 3

*sahayajnah prajaah srishtvaa purovaacha prajaapatih |
anena prasavishyadhvamesha vostvishtakaamadruk || 10 ||*

In ancient times, Prajaapati created humanity along with yajna. He said "through this (yajna) let everyone prosper, and may it become your fulfiller of wishes".

sahayajnah : with yajna
prajaah : humanity
srishtvaa : created
puraa : in ancient times
uvaacha : said
prajaapatih: prajaapati
anena : through this
prasavishyadhvam : may you prosper
eshah : this
vah : for you
astu : become
ishtakaamadruk : fulfiller of wishes

A common question for many of us is: "I understand the concept of selfless dedication. However, how do I know that I will be able to fulfill my material needs if I give up caring for the fruits of action altogether?" Shri Krishna has the answer : perform actions with selfless dedication or yajna, and your material needs will be provided for automatically.

If we work for a corporation, we do several different things everyday to fulfill our job responsibilities: respond to emails, attend meetings, draft project plans, make excel documents and so on. Do we ever think : "how much money will I get paid for opening this email? how much money do I get for attending this meeting?" If we have done our job right, the results will automatically come to us in the form of a monthly salary.

Shri Krishna explains that yajna is embedded within the fabric of humanity since time immemorial. It is a universal law. Once invoked, that law provides us with all that we need in this world. It becomes the "fulfiller of wishes". And the key to invoke that universal law is to perform selfless action dedicated to a higher ideal.

This is the essence of karmayoga.

Notes

1. Some commentators interpret the word "isthakaamadruk" to mean "kaamadhenu", the mythological cow that grants any wish asked of her. But even with this interpretation, the essence of this shloka remains unchanged.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 3

*devaanbhaavayataanena te devaa bhaavayantu vaha |
parasparam bhaavayantah shreyah paramavaapsyatha || 11 ||*

You will make the deities prosper through this (yajna), and the deities will make you prosper. By mutually making each other prosperous, you will attain the highest good.

devaan : deities
bhaavayata : make them prosper
anena: through this
te devaah : those deities
bhaavayantu : prosper
vaha : you
parasparam : mutual
bhaavayantah : making them prosper
shreyah : good
param : highest
avaapsyatha : attain

In this shloka, Shri Krishna emphasizes that the definition yajna includes all beings, not just the one individual who is following this technique.

Modern management practices agree that when two parties negotiate, the best outcome is one where both parties benefit, rather than one gaining and one losing. This outcome is known as a "win-win" situation. Shri Krishna reinforces this very same principle. He urges us to act in a spirit of harmony and cooperation with others whenever we undertake any action.

An interesting word is used here : "devataa" or deity. What does it represent? It represents each and every factor that is responsible for our action. In a narrow sense, it represents other individuals who collectively represent the higher ideal that we are working for, e.g. members in our family, colleagues in our company, citizens in our nation and so on.

But in a broad sense, it includes all humans, animals, plants and all of nature that we share this earth with. It is a recognition that there is a higher ideal operating at all times when we perform even a trivial action like eating our lunch. Shri Krishna urges us to not forget this point.

In essence, if we serve a higher ideal, that higher ideal will serve us. This is the message.

Conversely, Shri Krishna reminds us to not treat any individual, plant or animal with disrespect, since they are collectively serving us in some way or another.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 2

*ishtaambhogaanhi vo devaa daasyante yajnabhaavitaah |
tairdattaanapradaayaibhyo yo bhumgte stena eva sah || 12 ||*

The deities, nourished by yajna, will also provide you the objects you desire. One who consumes these objects without offering them to others, he is a thief.

So far, Shri Krishna spoke about the need for karmayoga, the actions to perform under karmayoga, and the attitude with which those actions should be performed. He also emphasized the notion of yajna or selfless dedication. Now Shri Krishna gives three levels of action that a person can operate under.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna points out the lowest level of action. This is when an individual consumes objects without making any contribution whatsoever. Shri Krishna uses a strong word to describe such an individual : a "thief". Such a selfish person does not care about anyone but himself due to his large ego.

An obvious example is someone who is part of a project team. He does not do any work in team but claims all the credit. In today's language we would call such a person a freeloader. Such people are never held in good standing by anyone.

In traditions all over the world, we see evidence that we are encouraged to give back something each time we take something. In Indian culture, it is customary that before one eats a meal, one offers it to the less fortunate, the wise and learned, and to animals. In most cultures, when you cut down a tree, you are encouraged to plant few more. Even in the corporate world, when a company earns profits, it invests a portion back into the business before handing out the dividends.

Therefore, taking without giving back is the lowest level of action. The next shloka illustrates the two higher levels of action. We need to gauge which level we belong to, so that we can start moving to the highest level of selflessness.

ishtaan : desired
bhogaan : objects
hi : also
vah : your
devaah : deities
daasyante : give you
yajna-bhaavitaah : nourished by yajna
taih : they
dattaan : objects
apradaaya : without offering to them
ebhyah : to others
yah : one who
bhumgte : consumes
stenah : thief
eva : is
sah : he

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 3

*yajnashishtaashinah santo muchyante sarvakilbishaih |
bhunjate te toagham paapaa ye pachantyaatmakaaranaat || 13 ||*

Those wise individuals who consume the remains of yajna, they are liberated from all sins. But those sinful ones who cook only for themselves, they consume only sin.

yajnashishtaashinah : remains of yajna
santah : wise individuals
muchyante : are liberated
sarva : from all
kilbishaih : sins
bhunjate : consume
te : they
tu : but
agham : sin
paapaah : sinful ones
ye : those
pachanti : cook
aatmakaaranaat : for themselves

In the previous shloka, Shri Krishna began the topic of the three levels of action. We saw that in the first level, the individual does not perform any action and only consumes. In this shloka, Shri Krishna explains the second and third levels of action.

Selfish action is the second level of action. In this level, the individual only thinks about himself. His vision is very narrow and limited. When this individual works in a team, his only thought is : how much of the result can be kept for myself? He also treats everyone he works with as his competitors. For him to win, they have to lose. Shri Krishna says that such individuals "cook only for themselves" and "consume only sin".

The third level and highest level of action is that of selfless action. The individual who works selflessly seldom thinks about himself. His vision is broad : he is always thinking about how to act such that his family will benefit, his employer will benefit, his nation will benefit and so on. He always treats others with respect, and as partners in collectively achieving the highest possible goal. Shri Krishna says that by working in this highest level of action, such "wise individuals" are "liberated from all sins".

Another mark of this individual that he treats everything that he possesses as materials to be used in a yajna. Which means that he does not consider anything as "mine" - everything belongs to the higher ideal (family, company, nation etc). So therefore, he is more than happy to partake in what's left after everyone else has consumed their share of the fruits of the yajna. Our natural tendency is to make a grab for our share and then let others worry about theirs. But this individual, keeping sight of the higher ideal at all times, ensures that others are taken care of before taking care of himself.

So what does this mean for us? When we perform any action ev-

every day, let us make an attempt to gauge the level of the action being performed by us. Is it selfish? selfless? or are we so lazy that we are not acting at all?

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 3

*annaadbhavanti bhootaani parjanyaadannasambhavaha |
yajnaadbhavati parjanyo yajnah karmasamudhbhavaha || 14 ||*

annaat : from food
bhavanti : is created
bhootaani : all beings
parjanyaat : from rain
anna : food
sambhavaha : is created
yajnaad : from yajna
bhavati : is created
parjanyah : rain
yajnah : yajna
karmasamudhbhavaha : is created from
action

From food are all beings created, from rain, food is created. Yajna gives birth to rain, and rain is born out of action.

Shri Krishna illustrates how yajna is embedded within the fabric of the entire universe. If we interpret this shloka literally, it refers to Vedic rituals that were used to invoke the rain-gods. But if we want to go deeper, we have to interpret this shloka symbolically.

We have seen that action is an integral tendency of any object in the universe. Even a tiny atom is always acting. So when any group of organisms - plants, animals, humans - collectively work for the sake of a higher ideal, that is called yajna. The output of this yajna is an environment that is charged with the potential to create almost anything. This environment is symbolically called "rain" in this shloka. Finally, this rain or productive potential creates all kinds of objects that are useful to organisms. The shloka refers to these objects as "food".

For instance, take a largely unknown area in northern California during World War II. Many scientists, lawyers, professors, business people came to this area with a higher ideal : to further the frontier of technology. Through their collective efforts, they created an environment which became conducive to technological innovation, which we now know as silicon valley. And silicon valley, even to this day, produces cutting edge products that benefit people around the world.

There are several such examples of environments born out of yajna: India's freedom struggle, the economic success of Singapore, the entertainment industry in Bombay and so on.

So the message here is that if people come together to work towards a higher ideal, it is a guarantee that their efforts will be successful.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 3

*karma brahmodbhavam viddhi brahmaaksharasamudbhavam |
tasmaatsarvagatam brahma nityam yajne pratishthitam || 15 ||*

karma : actions
brahmodbhavam : arise out of the Vedas
viddhi : know
brahma : Vedas
aksharasamudbhavam : arise out of
the imperishable
tasmaat : therefore
sarvagatam : all-pervading
brahma : eternal essence
nityam : always
yajne : yajna
pratishthitam : established

Know that actions arise out of the Vedas, and that the Vedas arise out of the imperishable (eternal essence). Therefore, yajna is always established in that all-pervading eternal essence.

Shri Krishna reveals the connection between yajna and the eternal essence in this shloka. Here he says that yajna is an integral part of the eternal essence, because it is born out of the Vedas. Symbolically, the Vedas represent the "rule-book" of the universe, and so yajna becomes an essential law embedded in the universe.

In the second chapter, which was an overview of the entire Gita, Shri Krishna pointed Arjuna to the ultimate goal of life - realization of the eternal essence. In this chapter, Shri Krishna connect karmayoga to the eternal essence. He explains that karmayoga is a means, a technique, to realize the eternal essence, because the eternal essence created the rules of the universe.

So in summary, the teaching of karmayoga so far is : Actions are of two types, selfless and selfish. Selfish actions bind us to wordly objects, and selfless actions do not. Therefore, Shri Krishna urges us to move gradually from the level of inaction to selfish action first, and then from selfish action to selfless action or yajna. Only through acting in the spirit of yajna will we move forward on the path to realizing the eternal essence.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 3

*evam pravartitam chakram naanuvartayateeha yaha |
aghaayurindriyaaraamo mogham paartha sa jeevati || 16 ||*

In this manner, one who does not follow this system of evolution, that malicious individual who dwells in sense pleasures, wastes his life.

evam : in this manner
pravartitam : evolution
chakram : system
na : does not
anuvartayati : follow
iha : this
yah : one who
aghaayu : malicious
indriyaaraamah : dwells in senses
mogham : waste
paartha : O Paartha
sah : that one
jeevati : lives

In the two preceding shlokas, Shri Krishna illustrated how several beings acting in the spirit of yajna brought forth the potential for serving each other. Now he takes the illustration one step further. He says that yajna is a "system of evolution". Which means, it is a method to move from a lower plane of existence to a higher plane of existence.

Darwin's theory of evolution describes how life evolved from simple single-celled organisms into plants, then into animals, then into primates, and culminated in our species, the humans. What comes next? Shri Krishna explains that humans, being the only species capable of rational analysis and thinking, have a choice: to remain at the current state and give in to their "lower nature", or evolve into a higher state of existence.

What is the "lower nature"? When one continually harbours selfish desires, and lives for the sake of sense pleasure, that person generates guilt, fear, anger, hatred, pride and other such emotions that strengthen the ego. Such an individual is termed "malicious" by Shri Krishna. That individual is said to have lived in vain, because he did not use the wonderful opportunity of being born as a human to access the higher nature.

And so, who is the individual of "higher nature"? It is the individual who has begun identifying with a higher ideal, and in doing so, has slowly eroded his ego in the selfless service of that higher ideal. A detailed description of such an individual was provided by Shri Krishna in the latter part of the second chapter in the "sthita-prajnalakshana" or the signs of a wise individual. Karmayoga is the first step to participate in this system of evolution.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 3

*yastvaatmaratireva syaadaatmatruptashcya maanavaha |
aatmanyeva cha santushtastasya kaaryam na vidyate || 17 ||*

But, one who revels only in the eternal essence, and is content and satisfied in the eternal essence, no duty exists for him.

While hearing Shri Krishna extol the need to act in this world, many of us - whether we admit it or not - may want to know whether there is an exception to this instruction. In other words, are there any circumstances where do not need to perform actions anymore? Shri Krishna gives the answer in this shloka and the next.

If we examine ourselves, we realize that we derive pleasure and satisfaction from external sources: material objects, people, relationships and so on. Pleasant memories, which can be considered internal to us, do give us joy but were generated from some external source in the past. But, in reality, the source of happiness is the absence of desires experienced when we finally attain a material object.

For instance, if we want to buy a new shirt, a desire is created in the mind. Till such time that we get the shirt, we will be unhappy because of that desire. But once the desire is fulfilled, we experience happiness for a brief period of time. Is that happiness caused by the shirt, or by the temporary absence of desires? The wise person knows that it is the latter.

So in this shloka Shri Krishna makes a bold statement. He says that till we derive pleasure and satisfaction from things external to us, we have to act in this world. Conversely, one who no longer derives pleasure and satisfaction from external sources does not need to act in this world. He "revels" in the eternal essence which he has learned to recognize within himself. He no longer has to look outside for happiness.

Is there a contradiction here? Earlier it was mentioned that if one is human, one has to act. But here, it is mentioned that the realized individual does not need to act? The answer is that once that individual has understood the true source of happiness, he loses the sense of doership. In other words, the notion that "I am doing this action" goes away, and all his actions become natural and spontaneous.

yah : one who
tu : but
aatma-ratih : revels in the eternal
essence
eva : only
syaat : remains
aatma-truptah : content in the eternal
essence
cha : and
maanavaha : individual
aatmani : in the eternal essence
eva cha : and
santushtah : satisfied
tasya : for him
kaaryam : duty
na vidyate : do not exist

As an example, if you truly love painting, and have mastered all the skills, then your painting becomes effortless and spontaneous. You experience a feeling that some people call "being in the zone". In fact, there may come a stage where you will feel that the hand is moving by itself, and the painting is happening on its own.

Similarly, all the actions of this wise individual become like that spontaneous painting.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 3

*naiva tasya krutenaartho naakruteneha kashchana |
na chaasya sarvabhooteshu kashchidarthavyapaashrayah || 18 ||*

For that (realized individual), there is nothing to be gained by action or inaction here. Also, he does not have even the slightest dependency on anyone for any object.

In the last shloka, Shri Krishna explained that one who has found delight solely in the eternal essence loses all sense of doership. In other words, all his actions become selfless and spontaneous, like an artist who cares only about creating paintings without any expectation (art for art's sake).

Shri Krishna further elaborates that point in this shloka. He says that for such a person, the concept of gain or loss does not exist, nor does the notion of dependency or support from anyone or anything.

To better understand this shloka, let us imagine a situation where one is at the end of a critical chapter in one's life, e.g. imagine that a person has submitted his resignation and is in the last week of his job. What will be his mindset? He will suddenly become the nicest guy in the office, and the most fun guy to hang out with. Why is that? Everyone knows that he has no agenda with anyone anymore, since it does not really matter. And he can surf the web all day long, because it does not really matter whether he works or doesn't work.

Another example could be a person who at age 65 has just retired. He has made a decent fortune with his savings, and can live comfortably till his last day. In addition, he is quite healthy and can still work if needed. But just like in the earlier example, it does not matter whether he performs any action or doesn't. Moreover, since he does not have any dependency on anyone, his savings make him self sufficient. Therefore, for the individual that has realized the worth of the eternal essence "treasure", any other material gain or loss does not hold any meaning.

Ultimately, these 2 shlokas reveal the state of a realized person, who by losing all sense of doership, renounces all action. Renouncing doership is renouncing action. The topic of renunciation is covered in detail in the forthcoming chapters.

na : not
eva : only
tasya : that realized individual
kruten : from action
arthaha : gained
na : not
akruten : from inaction
iha : here
kashchana: any
na : not
cha : also
asya : for him
sarvabhooteshu : with anyone
kashchit : slight/even a little
arthavya : object
apaashrayah : dependency

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 3

*tasmaadasaktah satatam kaaryam karma samaachara |
asakto hyaacharan karma paramaapnoti purushaha || 19 ||*

Therefore, always perform prescribed actions diligently without attachment; for, by performing action without attachment, an individual attains the supreme.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna concludes his answer to Arjuna's question from the first verse in this chapter. Arjuna had asked Shri Krishna as to why he should commit the act of war, which in his opinion was a ghastly act. Let us recap Shri Krishna's answer.

Shri Krishna replied by explaining that no one can flee from action, that one should perform selfless rather than selfish actions, that selfless actions in the service of a higher ideal do not create bondage, and that performance of selfless action or yajna is the key to participating in the evolution of oneself and of the universe.

Another point emphasized in this shloka is that karmayoga should not be something that is restricted to only a few aspects of life. The karmayoga mindset should eventually become second nature, in other words, it should be embedded in each and every action that we perform. So therefore, in each and every action that we perform, from writing an email to eating our meals, we should remember to derive joy from the action itself rather than in the result. Only then will we begin to drop attachment to the action and to the result.

tasmaat : therefore
asaktah : without attachment
satatam : always
kaaryam : prescribed
karma : actions
samaachara : diligently
asaktah : without attachment
hi : because
aacharan : perform
karma : action
param : highest
aapnoti : attain
purushaha : an individual

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 3

*karmanaiva hi samsiddhimaasthita janakaadayaha |
 lokasangrahamevaapi sampashyankartumarhasi || 20 ||*

**Only through action did many like king Janaka attain perfection.
 So, even from the viewpoint of societal welfare should you perform action.**

karmanaa : through action
 eva : only
 hi : also
 samsiddhim : perfection
 aasthitaaha : attained
 janakaadayaha : many like king Janaka
 lokasangraham : welfare of society
 eva : only
 api : even
 sampashyan : with a view
 kartum : action
 arhasi : perform

Having provided the rationale for karmayoga, Shri Krishna began to provide examples of individuals who gained liberation through karmayoga. He wanted to demonstrate that it indeed was the right path to follow. Providing an example would also eliminate any doubt in Arjuna's mind that karmayoga was a proven methodology, not a new invention.

The first example that Shri Krishna provided was that of king Janaka, an apt example since he was a warrior just like Arjuna. Many of us familiar with the Ramayana epic would recognize the name Janaka as the father of Sita, and the king of the Videha kingdom. But the word Janaka here is a post or a title. It refers to any king that was appointed to the throne because of his non-attachment to all material objects, even to his body. This is apparent in the word meaning of Videha which is "one who has given up identification with his body".

Why would a kingdom appoint a king that has given up attachments? It is because someone without any attachment would make the most fair, rational and unbiased decisions in favour of the kingdom. He would not come under the sway of emotion or prejudice of any kind. Such kings were known to be excellent administrators. In addition, they were also perfect karmayogis, i.e. they were "sthitha-prajna" or men of perfect wisdom.

With this example, Shri Krishna also assured Arjuna that it was perfectly possible to attain the ultimate goal of realization, yet be working in this world. Arjuna did not need to run away from the war or his responsibilities at all.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 21, Chapter 3

yadyadaacharati shreshthastattadevetaro janaha |
sa yatpramaanam kurute lokastadanuvartate || 21 ||

**Whatever an ideal person does, so do other people (imitate him).
 Whatever standard he sets, other people follow.**

: just as
 aacharati : a person does
 shreshthaha : ideal
 tat tat : in that manner
 eva : only
 itarah : other
 janaha : people
 sah : he
 yat : whatever
 pramaanam : standard
 kurute : does
 lokah : other people
 tat : like him
 anuvartate : they behave

In the previous verse, Shri Krishna provided the example of king Janaka who, though being a warrior king, achieved self-realization through performance of karma yoga. Here Shri Krishna puts forth yet another argument to Arjuna, knowing very well that Arjuna always put others first before himself. Shri Krishna said that whosoever looked up to Arjuna as a role model would also take to this path if Arjuna followed it.

Now, an extremely important but subtle point made by Shri Krishna is hidden in the phrase "ideal person does". He wants us to realize that actions speak louder than words. For instance, we cannot expect our children to not drink alcohol or smoke if we preach to them, but drink and smoke ourselves. Not just children, but most people watch what we do and not what we say. Therefore, Shri Krishna urges us to practice karmayoga, and not to simply tell people that we are learning it and so on.

So in addition to urging us and Arjuna to perform karmayoga, Shri Krishna also reveals an important leadership lesson. The best way to lead is to lead by example, and not by making flowery speeches or hiring motivational speakers. This point is not just echoed in the management texts of today, but also in spiritual masterpieces such as the Dasbodh by Samarth Ramdas Swami.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 22, Chapter 3

*na me paarthasti kartavyam trishu lokeshu kinchana |
naanavaaptamavaaptavyam varta eva cha karmani || 22 ||*

Neither do I have the least bit of duty in the three worlds, O Paartha, nor is there anything for me to gain or lose (through action), yet, I engage in action.

na : neither
me : I
paartha : O Paartha
asti : have
kartavyam : duties
trishu : three
lokeshu : in worlds
kinchana : even a little
na : nor
anavaaptam : not to be obtained
avaaptavyam : to be obtained
varte : engaged
eva : yet
cha : and
karmani : action

As we saw earlier, Shri Krishna wanted to provide concrete examples of individuals who had attained the eternal essence, yet continued to act selflessly in the world. Having given the example of king Janaka, Shri Krishna now spoke about himself as an example of an ideal karma yogi. He had attained a state of supreme independence where he no longer needed to act, yet, he continued to act spontaneously and joyfully in the service of humanity.

The Srimad Bhaagvatam is filled with stories describing the life of Shri Krishna, where we find that he worked tirelessly from the start to the end of his life. There was no duty that he did not perform. He became a charioteer upon Arjuna's request. After the Mahabhaarata war, Arjuna's brother Yudhishtira performed a yajna. There, Shri Krishna even washed the feet of guests who attended. While performing any action, his attitude was that of equanimity, and he found great joy in the work while not expecting any reward.

Shri Krishna's attitude towards life was like that of a perfect actor in a play. In fact, his stories are also known as "leelas" or divine plays. An actor in a play will perform any role - big or small - without the slightest attachment to it, and move to the next role effortlessly. Whether it was a mischievous boy who stole butter from people's homes, or the ruler of Dwarakaa city, Shri Krishna played his part perfectly with the attitude of a karma yogi.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 23, Chapter 3

*yadi hyaham na varteyam jaatu karmanyatandritaha |
mama vartamaanuvartante manushyaaha paartha sarvashaha || 23 ||*

For, if I were not to perform my duties alertly, people from everywhere will follow my path, O Paartha.

yadi : of
hi : for
aham : I
na : do not
varteyam : perform
jaatu : when
karmani : duties
atandritaha : alertness
mama : my
vartama : path
anuvartante : follow
manushyaaha : people
paartha : O Paartha
sarvashaha : from everywhere

To better understand this shloka, and make it more relatable, let us examine the life of a individual from our time who dedicated his life to the service of others - Baba Amte.

In his early years, he acted as a defense lawyer for freedom fighters imprisoned by British authorities in the 1942 Quit India movement. Later, Amte founded three ashrams for treatment and rehabilitation of leprosy patients, disabled people, and people from marginalized sections of the society in India. Today, the largest ashram named Anandwan has a university, an orphanage, and schools for the blind and the deaf, housing over 5,000 residents.

Now, imagine if someone like Baba Amte were to one day say "I think I am going to stop all my work and take it easy". What would be the impact on the general population? People would start saying "If even Baba Amte does not work, why should I do so?"

Therefore, Shri Krishna urged Arjuna to always perform action and not give in to the tendency of the human body to become lazy. If not for Arjuna's own sake, at least for the sake of others who considered him as a role model. And similarly, he urges us also to become role models by continually performing selfless actions, with complete attention and alertness.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 24, Chapter 3

*utseedeyurime lokaa na kuryaam karma chedaham |
samkaryasya cha kartaa syaamupahanyaamimaah prajaaha || 24 ||*

These people would be ruined if I stopped performing action. I would become the creator of confusion and destroy these beings.

utseedeyuh : ruined
ime : these
lokaah : people
na : not
kuryaam : perform
karma : action
chet : if
aham : I
samkaryasya : confusion
cha : and
kartaa : creator
syaam : I become
upahanyaam : destroy
imaah : these
prajaaha : beings

Shri Krishna further elaborates on the argument put forth in the last shloka. As someone who has realized the eternal essence, he does not have any obligations towards the world. But even then, he continues to act towards the welfare of society. Here, he says that if he stopped acting, all people who look up to him would be ruined and destroyed. We saw the example of a great social activist like Baba Amte, who although having performed such selfless service, continued to act till his last day. Society would take a huge hit if someone like him abruptly stopped working.

In addition, there is a subtler meaning here. Shri Krishna's statements have a cosmic significance. So therefore, the word "I" also refers to every law or principle that works every second of our lives and never ever takes a vacation.

For instance, we all know what happens to a society when there is a breakdown of law and order. There will be chaos, confusion and destruction all around. But civil and criminal laws are just man-made laws. Consider what would happen if the law of gravity, a universal law, stopped working. People, buildings, and every free standing object on this earth would start flying out into space to its eventual destruction. And finally, what if our breathing or pumping of the heart stopped working?

Therefore the message to Arjuna is clear. Any task, no matter how insignificant or unpleasant, should be performed selflessly and with dexterity, if it is in the service of the higher good.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 25, Chapter 3

*saktaah karmanyavidvaanso yathaa kurvanti bhaarata |
kuryaadvidvaanstathaasaktashchikeershulokasangraham || 25 ||*

Just as an ignorant individual performs action with attachment, O Bhaarata, so does a wise person perform action without attachment, wishing for the welfare of society.

saktaah : with attachment
karmani : in action
avidvaansah : ignorant
yathaa : just as
kurvanti : act
bhaarata: O Bhaarata
kuryaat : act
vidvaan : wise
tathaa : so does
asaktah : without attachment
chikeershuh : wishing
lokasangraham : societal welfare

Here, Shri Krishna offers a guideline for Arjuna in regards to working with other people. He says that one who is working with the attitude of karmayoga should learn to work in harmony with others who may have not yet understood or learned that technique. In other words, Shri Krishna warns us from adopting a "holier-than-thou" attitude with others when performing action.

For instance, imagine a little girl playing by herself, and pretending to make tea in a small cup. She brings an empty cup to her aunt and asks her to drink that tea. The aunt should enjoy that fake tea, not start questioning the reality of that team. There is no need to do so, the child is doing what is appropriate. Similarly, just because one is studying karmayoga does not make him or her eligible to behave differently with others.

Now, most of our actions are either performed individually or in a team. If we are performing actions individually, it is very straightforward to adopt the attitude of karmayoga. If we are working in a team, we could be playing the role of peers, leaders or followers. In all three of these situations, Shri Krishna urges us to maintain the attitude of karmayoga regardless of whether our peers, leaders or followers have the very same attitude. Their attitude in no way should impact the efficiency of our work.

This "live and let live" approach is extremely practical and sensible. But is there a reason behind it? Shri Krishna will explain in the next verse.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 26, Chapter 3

*na buddhibhedam janayedajnyaanaam karmasanginaam |
joshayetsarvakarmaani vidvaanyuktaha samacharan || 26 ||*

na : not to
buddhi : mind
bhedam : confusion
janayet : create
ajnyaanaam : ignorant people
karmasanginaam : attached to action
joshayet : engage
sarvakarmaani : all actions
vidvaan : wise individual
yuktaha : alert
samacharan : diligently act

No wise individual should create confusion in the minds of ignorant people who are attached to action. He should engage them in all actions, himself performing them diligently.

In the previous shloka, Shri Krishna asked Arjuna to follow a "live and let live" approach towards other people in this world who have not yet realized the extent of their attachments. In this shloka, Shri Krishna provides the reason behind that statement. We shall first look at an example in this regard.

Consider a car going at a fast speed on a major highway. Other cars on the highway are going equally as fast. The car contains a driver and one passenger who have divided the responsibilities equally : the driver is in charge of driving, and the passenger is in charge of navigation and directions. The passenger keeps the driver informed of where to turn, how much time is left before the next food break and so on.

Now in the middle of the journey, the passenger realizes that they are on the wrong highway. What is the best course of action for the passenger? If he says to the driver "Stop! We have to turn back!" it could unsettle the driver and potentially cause a major accident on the highway. Instead he chooses to gently inform the driver to take the next exit, stop for a few minutes in a safe area, and then figure out how to get back on the proper highway.

Similarly, when working with other people, the practitioner of karmayoga should continue to perform actions diligently instead of preaching to others about karmayoga, in other words, change their way of doing action. There will always be a tendency to misinterpret the message of karmayoga if we begin preaching it to others. As evidence, note that even Arjuna had incorrectly assumed that one should give up actions altogether.

Therefore, this shloka advises us to act diligently, and let others act to the best of their ability, and not to unsettle them in any way.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 27, Chapter 3

*prakruteh kriyamaanaani gunaih karmaani sarvashah |
ahamkaaravimoodhaatmaa kartaahamiti manyate || 27 ||*

All actions, in all situations, are performed by the gunaas of prakriti. He who is completely deluded by the ego thinks "I am the doer".

We saw earlier that an ignorant person is attached to action while a wise person is not. But what exactly does it mean to be attached to action? Shri Krishna clarifies that point in this shloka, which is yet another deep shloka with layers and layers of meaning. We shall approach it step by step to grasp its essentials.

First, let us take the example of someone who has accomplished a great thing, for example, won a Grammy award for outstanding singing. If that singer truly examines her accomplishment, she will realize that there were so many people and situations that were responsible for her accomplishment.

To begin with, her parents probably encouraged her to pursue music seriously. Her music teacher taught her the theoretical aspects of music. She met other musicians who helped hone her craft. She came across a situation that inspired her to write her award-winning song. Her accomplishment was a product of all these factors.

Compare that singer to some other award-winning singer who thinks that it was he who did it all, and does not even acknowledge the contribution of others. The notion that "I am the doer" is called "ahamkaara" or the ego, and creates an "us-vs-them" attitude. Someone who is under the influence of the ego is called deluded in this shloka.

Let us now look at what is meant by gunaas and prakriti so that we can better understand the shloka. Just like our scientists have discovered that all of matter is made up of fundamental particles known as atoms, ancient rishis postulated that all matter or prakriti is made up of combinations of three essential forces: an inert force, an active force, and a harmonizing force. These three forces or gunas are known as tamoguna, rajoguna and sattvaguna respectively.

Now here comes a statement which is a little difficult to swallow. Like the singer whose accomplishments had very little to do with her "own"

prakruteh : of prakriti
kriyamaanaani : act upon
gunaih : by the gunaas
karmaani : all actions
sarvashah : in all situations
ahamkaara : ego
vimoodhaatmaa : one who is complete deluded
kartaa : doer
aham : I
iti : in this way
manyate : thinks

Notes

1. Prakriti is further subdivided into the following 24 components:
 - 5 elements : space, air, fire, water, earth
 - 5 mediums : sound, touch, form, taste, smell
 - 5 sense organs : ear, skin, eye, tongue, nose
 - 5 organs of actions : speech, grasp, movement, generation, excretion
 - 4 internal organs : mind, intellect, memory, ego
2. Prakriti is also known as Maya

efforts, every action that we perform is in reality performed by prakriti that is comprised of the gunas.

So then who are "we"? We go back to the second chapter to remember that we are the eternal essence that is everlasting and all-pervading. Like the sun that enlivens the earth but does not itself do anything, the eternal essence does not perform any action. It only enlivens prakriti which is performing the action. Most of us that do not realize this truth, unfortunately, fall in the "ignorant" category. The next shloka shows us the goal : how to become wiser.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 28, Chapter 3

*tattvavittu mahaabaaho gunakarmavibhaagayoh |
gunaa guneshu vartanta iti matvaa na sajjate || 28 ||*

But he who knows the truth, O mighty-armed, about the divisions of gunaas as well as their functions, recognizes the interplay of gunaas (everywhere). Having known this, he does not get attached.

Previously, we learned about the ignorant individual who is deluded by the notion that he is the doer. But then, what does the wise person know that the ignorant one does not? Shri Krishna explains that point here.

The wise person is termed a "tattva-vit" - one who knows the truth - by Shri Krishna. The truth, as we saw earlier, is that all actions in this world are performed by prakriti. And prakriti is comprised of the three gunaas and their respective functions, termed in this shloka as "guna-karma-vibhaaga". But how exactly do we know that prakriti causes the actions, not the "I"?

Our sense organs are like agents that send messages to the mind when they perceive an object. For instance, if you hold a rose in your hand, the eyes, skin and nose send different signals to the mind. The mind creates a holistic picture from all those signals - "this is a red rose" - and sends it to the intellect. The intellect analyzes that information and makes a decision - "buy this rose", having consulted its memory of past experiences with roses.

This means that perception, thinking, decision-making - all these functions are part of prakriti, operating based on laws set by prakriti. The "I" is the eternal essence, different from prakriti.

So therefore, if one knows that he is not the doer, and that things are happening of their own accord, he does not get attached to anything in this world. He becomes a witness or a "saakshi", just like someone watching a play does not get attached to one actor or another. Another example is the process of digestion. We are not attached to it because we know that we are not the doer in that instance. The notion that everything is an interplay of gunaas may seem abstract and theoretical. One can only gain a first-hand experience of this truth in deep stages of meditation.

tattvavit : knower of truth
tu : but
mahaabaaho : O mighty-armed
gunaa : gunas
karma : functions
vibhaagayoh : distinction
gunaa : gunas
guneshu : in gunas
vartanta : act
iti : this
matvaa : having known
na : does not
sajjate : get attached

This teaching is beneficial in our day-to-day lives as well. If we contemplate on this teaching, it has the effect of thinning our ego. Once that happens, it makes us very humble and reduces several negative emotions like fear, anger, stress and so on. Now, we may fear that this teaching makes us lackadaisical. On the contrary, it makes thinking clear and actions more efficient by getting rid of negative emotions that drain our mental energy.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 29, Chapter 3

*prakritergunasammoodhaah sajjante gunakarmasu |
 taanakritsnavidō mandaankritsnavinna vichālayet || 29 ||*

People deluded by the gunaas of prakriti are attached to gunaas and action. The wise person does not disturb those fools who are of limited knowledge.

prakriteh : from prakriti
 guna-sammoodhaah : people deluded
 by the gunas
 sajjante : are attached to
 guna-karmasu : gunas and karmas
 taan : those
 akritsna : limited
 vidah : knowledge
 mandaan : fools
 kritsna : complete
 vit : one who knows
 vichālayet : do not disturb

Shri Krishna uses this shloka to reiterate the difference between a wise person and an ignorant or foolish person. It is nothing but their degree of attachment to gunaas (forces of nature) and their actions. He also restates that wise people should not preach karmayoga to those who are attached to gunaas and their actions. Instead, they should lead by example.

Why should they do so? The teacher in a school does not condemn or ridicule a student's ignorance about mathematics. He fully well knows that the student is in very early stages of his curriculum. With enough time and practice, the student will evolve into a higher level of math understanding.

Similarly, a wise person does not condemn or judge anyone, knowing that everyone is at a different level of spiritual evolution. "Judge not, that ye be not judged" as the Bible says in Matthew 7.1.

As a point of clarification, let us reexamine the message of the last 2 shlokas, which was that most of us mistakenly think that the "I" is the doer. We had seen that it is a tough statement to swallow, so let's look at a common question that arises when one hears this statement. "I am a well renowned surgeon. I just completed a successful triple-bypass surgery. So if I did not do it, who did?"

There was a team of three "agents" that performed the operation - the surgeon's mind, body and intellect. The mind gathered data from the five senses and presented it to the intellect. The intellect, based on past experiences and knowledge, took decisions. These decisions were sent to the surgeon's body, specifically the fingers, which performed the operation.

The real "I", which is the eternal essence, was a witness of this entire surgery. But the principle of the ego or ahamkaara created a mix-up

between the real-I and the three agents: mind, body and intellect. Reversing this fundamental mix-up is the ultimate goal of karmayoga, in fact, of any yoga.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 30, Chapter 3

*mayi sarvaani karmaani sannyasyaadhyaatmachetasaa |
niraasheernirmamo bhootvaa yudhyasva vigatajvaraha || 30 ||*

mayi : to me
sarvaani : all
karmaani : actions
sannyasya : dedicate
adhyaatma-chetasaa : with intellect
niraasheeh : without expectation
nirmamah : without sense of I
bhootvaa : make
yudhyasva : fight
vigatajvaraha : without mental distress

Dedicate all your actions to me, using your intellect. Without expectation or sense of my-ness, fight without mental distress.

Shri Krishna provides the essence of the entire chapter in this shloka, one of the most important shlokas in this chapter. It can be considered "karmayoga in a nutshell". In this shloka, he covers the following 3 topics:

1. What should be our attitude while performing actions?
2. What kinds of actions should we perform?
3. How do we make our actions more efficient?

First, he talks about the attitude that one should maintain while performing actions. He says that before, during and after the action, one should continuously dedicate the action to a higher ideal. It can be any higher ideal like our family, employer or nation, but we should consider it pure and divine, indicated by the word "me" in the shloka.

What is important here is never get out of tune with the higher ideal - it is like talking to a friend constantly on a handsfree telephone while performing all actions. We can use the ritual of a "pooja" to practice this act of dedication, but the key is to do it constantly, not just during the pooja. Furthermore, we will know whether the action was in service of a higher ideal or of our ego by the feeling we get once the action is complete. If we find that we have a deep sense of peace and contentment after the action was performed, it was in the service of a higher ideal.

Secondly, he asks us to use our intellect to guide us so that only correct actions, those that are our duties, are performed by us. Actions that are unethical or illegal should be discarded by the intellect. He urges us to strengthen and reinforce the intellect's power of discrimination, or viveka.

Finally, Shri Krishna gives us a formula to make actions extremely

efficient. He explains that our mental energy and focus "leaks" out of our system through three sources: brooding over the past, becoming anxious about the future, and becoming overly excited in the present. How does this leakage happen?

"Aashaa" or harbouring expectations is akin to living in the future because it gives rise to anxiety. It is as if we are insulting the present moment. "Mamatva" or my-ness implies that we are giving undue importance to our past achievements. In other words, we are living in the past. No matter what happened in the past usually gives rise to sorrow if we brood over it. And "jvarah" or extreme excitement and agitation in the present has the effect of destabilizing our mind and intellect.

All of these three tendencies ultimately take attention away from the present moment, strengthen our ego and diminish our efficiency. So therefore, a true karmayogi always lives in the present moment and gives complete and undivided attention to the task at hand, no matter what kind of task it is. Shri Krishna urges us to give up expectation for the future ("niraasha"), anxiety over the past ("nirmamah") and overexcitement in the present ("vigatajvarah").

Notes

1. Eckhart Tolle has written an entire book on the topic of acting in the present moment called "The Power Of Now".

Bhagavad Gita Verse 31, Chapter 3

*ye me matamidam nityamanutishthanti maanavaaha |
shradhvaavantonasooyanto muchyante tepi karmabhih || 31 ||*

Those who always execute this teaching of mine, with faith and without objection, they too are freed from all actions.

ye : those
me : my
matam : teaching
idam : this
nityam : always
anutishthanti : execute
maanavaaha : people
shradhvavantah : faith
anasooyanto : without objection
muchyante : freed
te : those
api : too
karmabhih : actions

As we have seen so far, if we are bound to actions and objects, we will never be able to realize the eternal essence, which is the ultimate goal prescribed by the Gita. So in this shloka, Shri Krishna begins to conclude the teaching of karmayoga by reassuring us that it will free us from all bondages while we are engaged in action.

Prior to the Gita coming into existence, people heralded a misconception that spiritual realization was the domain of a select section of society, and could be achieved only through the accomplishment of extremely secret and arcane rituals. The Gita proposed a radical new method of realization where anyone regardless of their background can get the same result while performing any and all actions.

So therefore, Shri Krishna urges us to overcome any misconceptions, barriers and objections we may harbour against this teaching. Some may say, this teaching is too simplistic. Others may say, it goes against whatever preconceived notions they have about religion. Or that it is not achievable and so on. Whatever be the objection, Shri Krishna wants us to put the teaching into practice and try it out for ourselves.

Now, as he is about to conclude the teaching of karmayoga, Shri Krishna anticipates a problem. He knows that even for people who are ready and willing to take this path will run into obstacles. He covers this topic in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 32, Chapter 3

*ye tvetadabhyasooyanto naanutishthanti me matam |
sarvajnyaanavimoodhaamstaanviddhi nashtaanachetasaha || 32 ||*

But those who object to this teaching and do not follow it, they are confused in all of their knowledge. Know those people who are devoid of discrimination to be ruined.

Shri Krishna urged us to resolve all our objections to the teaching so that we may be able to incorporate it into our lives. But even if we overcome our philosophical objections, most of us will still find it difficult to follow the practice of karmayoga. Shri Krishna therefore begins to explain what prevents us from adopting karmayoga, and consequently, how should we tackle those obstacles.

The primary obstacle to karmayoga are our vaasanaas. Once a person is under the influence of vaasanaas, their actions will be prompted by selfish motives. These motives are expressed as negative emotions such as jealousy: "I will do things to make others jealous", or out of anger: "I will destroy this person", or greed: "I will earn so much even if it means I compromise on ethics". Some people even pass on negative motives to their children, e.g. "I was not able to destroy this family, so you go ahead and do it, my son".

Now, when we dwell in negative emotions such as jealousy, anger, greed etc., our intellect knows that what we are doing is wrong. But since our vaasanaas have overpowered the intellect, it does not function and so we follow a wrong path. We are then ruined because we are going against the laws of nature. What would happen if we disregarded the law of gravity? We would perish. A similar fate exists if we do not pursue karmayoga.

So the question is : how exactly do vaasanaas cause us not follow karmayoga? Shri Krishna covers this topic next.

ye : those
tu : but
etad : this
abhyasooyantah : with objection
na : do not
anutishthanti : follow
me : my
matam : teaching
sarvajnyaana : in all knowledge
vimoodhaan : confused
taan : those
viddhi : know
nashtaan : to be ruined
achetasaha : devoid of discrimination

Bhagavad Gita Verse 33, Chapter 3

*sadrisham cheshtate svasyaaha prakritejnyaanavaanapi |
prakritim yaanti bhootaani nigraha kim karishyati || 33 ||*

sadrisham : according to
cheshtate : behave
prakriteh : of nature
jnyaanavaan : wise person
api: even
prakritim : nature
yaanti : follow
bhootaani : all beings
nigraha : restraint
kim : what
karishyati : will do

Even a wise person will behave according to his own nature. All beings follow their own nature. What can restraint do?

Shri Krishna here addresses a critical point, which is that even the most well-read and educated person will find it difficult to practice karmayoga. Why is this so? It is because inbuilt tendencies and urges inside us compel us to act against our will. These tendencies comprise our lower nature. Note that the lower nature is also called "prakriti" here, which is different than the prakriti that we saw earlier.

All beings - plants, animals and humans - are born with an innate set of traits. In humans, these traits are manifested in the body, mind and intellect. These traits are a product of our vaasanaas, which are impressions created by past actions.

It does not matter whether one is wise or foolish, rich or poor etc. All human beings are born with vaasanaas. These vaasanaas are "thought generators". They cause thoughts about the material world to arise in our mind. And once a thought arises, it results into desire and action as we saw in the second chapter.

Therefore, Shri Krishna says that mere restraint of actions will not result in eradication of desires, since the vaasanaas will continue to generate more and more thoughts. And direct suppression of thoughts is next to impossible. Many people try to repress thoughts and desires in the hope of progressing spiritually, but like a spring that is pushed down, that strategy backfires very easily.

But then, should we give up our efforts altogether? That is not the case. For example, you cannot teach tiger to be non-violent and eat grass. But you can change his behaviour to a certain extent through repeated training. Similarly, the vaasanaas can be channeled in the service of society. Like judo uses the opponent's strength to subdue the opponent, karmayoga uses the energy of vaasanaas to extinguish themselves.

So therefore, Shri Krishna gives us a way out. Even though all of us

have tendencies that can drag us lower, we can analyze those tendencies and overcome them through the technique of karmayoga. Having explained this, Shri Krishna gives us the exact location of our enemies, these lower tendencies, in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 34, Chapter 3

*indriyasyendriyasyaarthe raagadveshau vyavasthitau |
 tayorna vashamaagacchetau hyaasya paripanthinau || 34 ||*

Likes and dislikes for sense objects reside in the senses. One should not come under their sway, for they are highway robbers.

Having explained that our inherent tendencies are the biggest obstacle in karmayoga, Shri Krishna points out their precise location. He says that the tendencies manifest as likes and dislikes for material objects. These tendencies reside in our senses: the eyes, ears, skin, tongue and nose.

First let's look at likes and dislikes. The only way we can truly understand the shape of our inherent tendencies is through a deep examination of our likes and dislikes. Every human being harbours likes and dislikes. It is so strange that two children having grown up in the exact same home and family environment reveal such different likes and dislikes, even as toddlers.

So where are the likes and dislikes stored? They reside in our sense organs. The tongue is attracted to the taste of fries, and is repelled by the taste of spinach. The eye likes a certain kind of form and is repelled by another and so on. In his commentary on the Gita, Sant Jnyaneshwar compares the sense organs to dangerous animals and asks : does one befriend a snake, or maintain the company of tigers?

So therefore, what is the solution? We should not come under the sway of likes and dislikes by being aware of them especially when they strike, by using our intellect to guide us, and by continually reminding ourself of the higher ideal we have set for ourselves in karmayoga. We should not let them create a roadblock in our path. Like an elephant that moves on its path even though dogs bark at it, we should keep likes and dislikes at bay and never lose sight of our path and goal.

The first chapter of the Gita provides the best example for this shloka. Arjuna loved warfare, but he did not like the Mahabhaarata war simply because his relatives were on the other side. Shri Krishna, representing the intellect, guided him towards the right path. Another example is when a doctor prescribes us bitter medicine - we may not like but we take it nevertheless.

indriyasya : in the sense organs
 indriyasya : in each and every
 arthe : for the sense objects
 raaga-dveshau : like and dislike
 tayoh : both
 na : should not
 vasham : under their control
 aagacchet : one should not come
 tau : both of them
 hi : for
 asya : in this
 paripanthinau : highway robbers

Shri Krishna compares likes and dislikes to highway robbers who target travellers that are unprepared and not alert. The robbers will come out of nowhere, and distract travellers from their path. Similarly, the likes make us run towards them and dislikes make us run away, but ultimately both take us away from our path. By being constantly alert that likes and dislikes can arise, we can reduce their influence.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 35, Chapter 3

*shreyaansvadharma vigunaha paradharmatsvanushthitaat |
svadharma nidhanam shreyaha paradharmo bhayaavahaha || 35 ||*

shreyaan : is better
vigunaha : imperfect
svanushthitaat : perfect
nidhanam : dying
shreyaha : it is better
bhayaavahaha : cause of fear and danger

Following one's own nature, though imperfect, is still better than following another's nature that is perfect. Even dying in one's nature is better, and the nature of another leads to danger.

On the surface, this shloka seems to contradict the previous shloka where Shri Krishna advocated that we should not let our likes and dislikes, i.e. our nature, take us away from our goal. Here, he seems to say that we should follow our nature instead. Let us try to analyze this paradox.

Earlier, we came across the notion of svadharma, which is work that one enjoys doing, has the aptitude and training for doing, and is not illegal or unethical. Svadharma is nothing but our strongest likes and desires, and only we can judge what they are.

Upon self-examination, we may find that we gravitate towards a career in art, or music, or science and so on. Let's say we determine that science is our strongest like. That now becomes our svadharma. We use the enormous pressure of our interest in science in the service of a higher goal, by becoming a researcher, for instance.

Another implication of this message is that the force generated by our svadharma should be used in evolution of our personality. A person with a strong desire to fight can become a soldier if he uses his svadharma in the service of his country. But he can also become a gangster if his svadharma is not dedicated to a higher ideal.

Therefore, what this shloka says is that once we have selected a strong desire as our svadharma, we should not let weaker likes or dislikes distract us from the svadharma. For example, let's say we are pursuing a PhD in science. We may come across someone following a different profession and who earns significantly more money. We should not cause our liking for more money to change our path. Not only will it help us reach our spiritual goal, we will have peace of mind too.

What is unique about this approach is that it emphasizes introspection over blind faith. The beauty of the Gita's teaching is that takes

care of every person. There is no fixed rigid path - each one arrives at their own path through self-analysis. It is like a kitchen where each spice is unique, but has a distinct role to play in making a meal.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 36, Chapter 3**Arjuna uvaacha:**atha kena prayuktoyam paapam charati poorushah |
anicchannapi vaarshneya balaadiva niyojitaha || 36 ||*

atha : then
 kena : which
 prayuktah : compels
 paapam : sin
 charati : commit
 poorushah : people
 api : also
 vaarshneya : O Vaarshneya
 balaat : forcefully
 iva : as if
 niyojitaha : commanded

Then, what compels people to commit sin against their wishes, O Vaarshneya, as if commanded forcefully?

In the last shloka, Shri Krishna completed his teaching of karmayoga. But Arjuna was not satisfied. He was listening attentively and wanted to know more details around the obstacles to karmayoga, how to spot them and how to get rid of them.

It is a wonderful question, because as we have seen earlier, obstacles to karmayoga pop up when we least expect them. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the obstacles is needed to fully overcome them. Note that Arjuna addresses Shri Krishna as "vaarshneya", which means a member of the Vrishni dynasty.

Even in simple matters like our food intake, we face obstacles. Most of us are smart enough to know that foods containing a lot of oil and sugar are not good for us. But when we see our favourite dessert in front of us, we are propelled to eat it. All our intellect stops functioning. Well educated people, under the influence of greed, commit all kinds of scams today.

There is an interesting statement made by Duryodhana in the Maabhaaraata. He says that even he knows that his actions are wrong, but there is something inside him that forces him to carry out those actions. This means that even a strong intellect is not necessarily able to check our behaviour.

In the final portion of the third chapter, Shri Krishna responds to Arjuna's doubt to describe the obstacles in detail and the method to control their influence on us.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 37, Chapter 3**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**kaama esha krodha esha rajogunasamudhbhavaha |
mahaashano mahaapaapmaa viddhyenamiha vairinam || 37 ||*

kaamah : desire
 eshah : this
 krodha : anger
 esha : this
 rajoguna : rajas
 samudhbhavaha : originated from
 mahaashanah : voracious eater
 mahaapaapmaa : massive sinner
 viddhi : know
 enam : it
 iha : in this
 vairinam : enemy

Shree Bhagavaan said: It is desire, it is anger, born of rajas. It is a voracious eater, a great sinner. Know it to be the enemy (here in this world).

Earlier, Shri Krishna had mentioned that likes and dislikes are like highway robbers. They distract us from our path. But now, he uses the term "enemy" to refer to desire. What is the difference between a highway robber and an enemy? A highway robber does not care who we are, he just wants to distract us, rob us and let us go. But an enemy knows us, knows our weaknesses well, and intends to cause us great harm. Therefore, desire and anger are much more dangerous than likes and dislikes.

When we give a lot of attention to our likes and dislikes, it increases the proportion of the active quality, or rajas, in our system. When this happens, our likes and dislikes grow in size like weeds and become strong desires. We then go into a vicious cycle : strong desires create more rajas, which in turn makes the desires even stronger. Similarly, if dislikes grow, they turn into anger and hatred.

Now, when a strong desire gets fulfilled, there is a temporary pause in that desire, and the mind becomes still for a short amount of time. As we have seen earlier, an absence of desires clears the mind and lets the eternal essence shine through. When that happens, we experience peace and happiness. But, most of us wrongfully attribute that temporary spark of happiness to the object we just acquired, rather than to the absence of desire. So then, we go through life fueling our desires, in the hope that we can recreate that experience.

The tendency to recreate happiness through repetitive acquisition of an object is called greed. Moreover, the ego becomes strong through the increase in rajas, and it begins to go outward, comparing us with others. If someone has less than us, pride is created. Conversely, if someone has more than us, jealousy is created.

The practical lesson here is that we should not encourage our likes

and dislikes. In other words, if a like or dislike arises in the mind, we should not give it too much attention. If we do, it will get stronger. It is easier to control a like or a dislike. Once it has grown into a strong desire or hatred, then it becomes much difficult to control.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 38, Chapter 3

*dhoomenaavriyate vahinyarthaadarsho malena cha |
yatholbenaavrito garbhastathaa tenedamaavritam || 38 ||*

dhoomena : by smoke
aavriyate : covers
vahinaha : fire
yathaa : like
aadarshah : mirror
malena : dirt
cha : and
yathaa : like
ulbena : womb
aavritaha : covers
garbhaha : foetus
tathaa : so does
tena : that
idam : this
aavritam : cover

Just as smoke covers fire, dirt covers a mirror, and a womb covers a foetus, so does this (desire) cover that (wisdom).

Earlier Shri Krishna explained that when likes and dislikes morph into desire and hatred, they increase the rajas in our system, creating a vicious cycle. So what is the end result? Here, he says that when desire and hatred arise, they shut off or conceal our wisdom.

Our wisdom, or ability to discriminate, resides in our intellect. Due to a lifetime's worth of conditioning, this wisdom does not become our second nature. Wisdom is like a shining light, which can easily be covered if we are not careful. So desire, or anger, arise from the deeper, subconscious aspects of our mind and cover this light of wisdom. We then lose any ability to decide right from wrong, and behave foolishly. Shri Krishna says here that our wisdom can be covered in three ways.

The thickest, most dense covering occurs due to taamasic desires. These are desires that have lived inside our system for ages, and once they get activated, they totally cover the wisdom just like a womb covers a foetus. And just like there is no other way to see the foetus other than to wait for its birth, the only way to get rid of taamasic desires is to wait. They are so strong, and so in tune with our likes and dislikes, that nothing can be done once they are activated. Examples of taamasic desires are excessive drinking, drug usage, or even the overpowering desire to be "right" which can lead you into violent fights and arguments.

Less potent than taamasic desires are raajasic desires. As Shri Krishna says in this shloka, their veiling of wisdom is less thicker than taamasic desires. They are like dust on a mirror, where one stroke of the hand cleans the mirror. Raajasic desires are usually motivated by greed. Examples include buying the latest gadget, boasting of one's accomplishments to one's friends and so on.

Finally, saatvic desires are those that cover our wisdom very lightly. The desire to attend a satsang, or to attain moksha, is a saatvic desire. Our wisdom shines the brightest, or in other words, operates at the

greatest capacity through saatvic desires.

As we progress in our journey, let us try to be alert and at least try to track the desires that we harbour. How many desires are we living with? What is the proportion between saatvic, raajasic and taamasic? Are we slowly changing the proportion in favour of saatvic desires?

In this shloka, the mysterious phrase "this covers that" was used. Although we got a sense of what that means here, Shri Krishna goes into more detail in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 39, Chapter 3

*aavaritam jnyaanametena jnyaanino nityavairinaa |
kaamaroopena kaunteya dushpoorenaanalena cha || 39 ||*

aavaritam : covered
jnyaanam : wisdom
etena : this
jnyaaninah : intelligent people
nityavairinaa : eternal enemy
kaamaroopena : in the form of desire
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
dushpoorena : insatiable
analena : fire
cha : and

This wisdom of even intelligent people is covered by that eternal enemy, in the form of desire, which is like an insatiable fire.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna gives the meaning of the terms "this" and "that" that were used in the previous shloka. He says that desire is the "that" by which "this" wisdom is covered. If wisdom is covered, then prakriti takes control of us, and we fall into the depths of unintelligent behaviour.

Shri Krishna uses two metaphors to describe desire. First, he calls desire an eternal enemy. We may think that we have subdued desire, but its seed lies waiting in the form of likes and dislikes. When we least expect it, it will arise and turn into a strong desire within milliseconds. Hence, by calling it an eternal enemy, Shri Krishna urges us to be eternally alert and vigilant in regards to our desires.

The other metaphor used for desire is that of a fire. Fire never says no to any fuel that is added to it. It is capable of surviving indefinitely as long as fuel is provided. But conversely, it ends the minute it runs out of fuel. Therefore, Shri Krishna urges us to take our focus away from thoughts of like and dislike as soon as we are aware of them. It is the power behind thought that fuels likes and dislikes to stronger.

So therefore, having convinced Arjuna that desire and anger lie him and not within someone else, he proceeds to reveal their location to Arjuna in the next shloka. He purposely uses the language of war so that Arjuna will respond with rapt attention.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 40, Chapter 3

*indriyaani mano buddhirasyaadhishtaanamuchyate |
etaivimohayatyasha jnyaanamaavritya dehinam || 40 ||*

indriyaani : senses
manah : mind
buddhih : intellect
asya : this
adhishtaanam : residence
uchyate: it is said
etaih : these
vimohayati : delude
jnyaanam : wisdom
aavritya : cover
dehinam : body-dweller

The senses, mind and intellect are said to be its residence. Through them, this (desire) covers the body-dweller's wisdom.

Like a military strategist reveals the location of the enemy to the warrior, Shri Krishna in this shloka reveals the location of the karmayogi's enemy. The enemy in the form of desire has three residences. The first residence is the senses, the second is the mind, and the third is the intellect. Note that he uses the term "body-dweller" to remind us that the body, mind and intellect are separate than the eternal essence.

In the senses, desire and anger manifest as likes and dislikes, as we have seen before. Now, each sense organ has its own likes and dislikes. For example, the ear may find some sounds pleasing and others harsh. These likes and dislikes come from our natural tendencies or prakriti. You can see likes and dislikes in animals as well. Your pet dog may prefer one kind of food over another.

There is not much that we can do about our natural tendencies. We just need to ensure that they do not obstruct us from our goals. But when we feed them by giving them time and attention, they get charged by our emotions and take residence in our mind. Our mind is the faculty that gathers data from the senses and creates a coherent picture of what is being sensed. It also generates thoughts based on current and past impressions.

Our language will give us an indication of whether a like is residing in our senses or in our mind. If we say, "I like to eat fries" or "I prefer fries", it is still at the level of senses. But if we say, "I absolutely love fries, I cannot do without them", it means that the like has now gone into the mind.

There is another indication that a desire has penetrated into the mind. A desire can be active even if the object of the desire is not perceived by the senses. If we dislike a person only when we meet him, then that dislike is at the level of the senses. But if we keep thinking "I hate that person" even when he is not in front of us, then that dislike has become hatred and has penetrated our mind.

The last and most dangerous place for a desire to reside is in our intellect, which is the faculty that takes decisions based on analysis and rationality. If we begin to justify and rationalize our loves and hates, it means that the desire has penetrated into our intellect. It is extremely difficult to tackle such desires, because they have completely taken hold of us: our senses, our mind and our intellect. Someone who resorts to violence and is utterly convinced of his position will even quote from scriptures to justify his actions, for instance.

So therefore, Shri Krishna provided Arjuna with the location and nature of the enemy that he needed to tackle. He explains the technique of tackling the enemy in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 41, Chapter 3

*tasmaattvaminidriyaanyadau niyamy bharatarshabha |
paapmaanam prajahi hyonam jnyaanavijnayaananaashanam || 41 ||*

Therefore, first control the senses, O excellent among Bharataas, and with force, definitely kill this destroyer of knowledge and wisdom.

tasmaat : therefore
tvam : you
indriyaani : senses
adau : first
niyamy : control
bharatarshabha : excellent among
Bharataas
prajahi : kill with force
hi : definitely
enam : this
jnyaana : knowledge
vijnyaana : wisdom
naashanam : destroyer

Having revealed the location of desire, Shri Krishna now provides a method of taming desire. He advises Arjuna to first control desire at the level of the senses. Desires originate in the likes and dislikes present in the senses, and therefore, that is where we should go after them.

This requires us to be constantly aware and alert of our likes and dislikes, and not to get overpowered by them once we see them arise. For example, we can detect anger towards someone we dislike arise in our mind. We may try to suppress angry thoughts, but that is not feasible. Therefore we should first learn to control anger at level of the tongue by not speaking any harsh words towards that person.

How do we remain alert? There are several techniques to make us alert and bring us to the present moment. The simplest technique is to take a few breaths and just focus attention on the inhaling and exhaling. This will immediately stop all mental "chatter".

Shri Krishna also mentions here that desire not only destroys knowledge but also wisdom. So let us correctly understand what is meant by wisdom here. Essentially, knowledge + experience = wisdom. If we read something in a book, then it is knowledge. But if we experience something on our own, then we own it and it becomes wisdom.

With this shloka, Shri Krishna answered the question raised by Arjuna, which was in regards to obstacles to karma yoga. He also provided a simple technique that only begins to address the obstacles, but does not completely eradicate them. In the next two verses, he concludes the topic of karmayoga by providing the advanced technique of removing these obstacles.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 42, Chapter 3

*indriyaani paranyaahurindriyebhyaha param manaha |
manasastu paraa buddhiryo buddheh paratastu saha || 42 ||*

It is said that the senses are superior (than the body), the mind is superior than the senses, the intellect are superior than the mind, and that (the eternal essence) is superior than the intellect.

As we approach the conclusion of the third chapter, Shri Krishna delivers yet another profound shloka that has layers and layers of meaning. Let us examine its practical aspects.

This shloka provides us a hierarchy of our nature, or our prakriti. Earlier in the second chapter, Shri Krishna provided us with the ultimate goal of the Gita, which is to realize that we are the eternal essence, and are distinct from our prakriti, which comprises the body, mind and intellect. So in this shloka, he further informs us that these three components of our prakriti are not equally powerful - there is a hierarchy or an order to their power. The subtler a component is, the more power it wields.

The body is the most tangible, or the most gross, aspect of prakriti. Subtler than the body are the senses. Subtler than the senses is the mind, which generates reactions in the form of emotions and thoughts, but lacks decision making power. Subtler than the mind is the intellect, which can analyze and understand the thoughts generated by the mind, and has the power to control the mind, the senses and the body. And here is the key point: if we assert control of one aspect of prakriti, we automatically bring all the lower levels in our command.

For example, let's say someone wants to quit smoking. If he convinces his intellect that smoking is harmful, and also remains alert at the time a desire to smoke arises, he has a good chance of quitting smoking. But if the intellect starts rationalizing this behaviour by saying "one cigarette is not a problem" then there is no chance.

Now, if we are operating on the level of our vaasanaas, the intellect is where the hierarchy would stop. Then desires would take hold of the senses, the mind and even the intellect, making us act selfishly. There would be no way out. But this shloka urges us to realize that there is something even superior to the intellect, which has the poten-

indriyaani : the senses
parani : superior
aahuh : is said
indriyebhyaha : than the senses
param : superior
manaha : mind
manasaha : than the mind
tu : also
paraa : superior
buddhih : intellect
yah : that which
buddheh : than intellect
paratastu : superior
tu : also
saha : that

Notes

1. Bringing one's prakriti under control is one component of the "saadhana-chatushtaya", or the four-fold qualifications of a seeker. Control of the senses is called "dama" and control of the mind is called "kshama".

tial to root our desires that have penetrated the intellect. In the initial stages of our journey, that something is a higher ideal. But as we proceed in our journey, it is the highest possible ideal: the eternal essence itself. Unless we recognize this, we will be stuck at the level of the intellect. This paves the way for the technique of removing obstacles, which is covered in the next and final shloka of the third chapter.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 43, Chapter 3

*evam buddheh param buddhvaa sanstabhyaatmaanamaatmanaa |
jahi shatrum mahaabaaho kaamaroopam duraasadam || 43 ||*

In this way, having known the eternal essence to be superior than the intellect, and having strengthened oneself by oneself, O mighty-armed, slay the insurmountable enemy in the form of desire.

evam : in this way
buddheh : with intellect
buddhvaa : having known
sanstabhyaha : strengthened
aatmaanam : oneself
aatmanaa : by oneself
jahi : slay
shatrum : enemy
mahaabaaho : O mighty-armed
kaamaroopam : in the form of desire
duraasadam : insurmountable

The prior shloka and this shloka comprise the concluding shlokas of the third chapter. In these 2 shlokas, Shri Krishna gives Arjuna the seed of an entire lifetime's worth of spiritual practice. But this technique needs further elaboration, which will be provided in the forthcoming chapters of the Gita. Karmayoga is just the preparatory stage. The real journey of spiritual practice or saadhanaa commences only when we learn to control and channel our vaasanaas through karmayoga, which culminates in the practice of meditation.

One of the major points made in this shloka is that we have tackle our problems from the standpoint of the eternal essence, not from the standpoint of our prakriti, which is not our real identity. We have been conditioned to identify with our prakriti since our birth, which is what makes it difficult. Therefore, to the extent possible, we should always try to identify with the eternal essence.

For instance, we come across a thought that says "I can smoke one cigarette today, it will cause me no harm", we have to be alert and ask ourselves, who is this I that has generated this thought? If we are truly identified with the eternal essence, we will recognize that our prakriti - our inbuilt tendency - is saying it. This is not easy to do. Typically, when such a thought arises, it "short-circuits" our intellect and turns into action immediately. That is why Shri Krishna urges us to start on the path of karmayoga so that we slowly lose attachment with material objects first, then with our body/mind/intellect.

This inner conflict between our lower nature and our higher nature is the central theme of the Gita. Therefore, Shri Krishna concludes the chapter on karmayoga with a profound message: strengthen oneself by oneself. It means that by practicing karmayoga, we strengthen our higher nature, and that enables us to control our lower nature.

om tatsatiti shreematbhagavatgitasupanishadsu brahmavidyaayam

yogashaastre shreekrishnaarjunsamvade karmayogo naama tritiyodhyaayaha

|| 3 ||

Summary of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 3

In chapter 2, Shri Krishna explained that the ultimate spiritual goal is the elimination of our *vaasanaas*. In chapter 3, he provides the technique of *karmayoga* which is the first step that all of us have to take in order to begin the process of elimination of *vaasanaas*.

First, he stressed the need to convince ourselves that we have to act. We simply cannot think that we can eliminate *vaasanaas* by not acting. Once we have convinced that we have to act, we have to adopt the attitude of *karmayoga* so that further actions do not cause bondage. The attitude of *karmayoga* comprises five aspects of knowledge or *buddhi* that we need to maintain while performing any action:

1. *Samatva Buddhi* : We need remain calm but alert in all situations. As the earlier chapter explained, situations are transient, they come and go. Having understood that they are transient, we should not get overly excited or agitated with each new situation.
2. *Svadharma Buddhi* : We should conduct self-analysis to understand where our strongest desires lie, and then deploy those desires in the service of a higher ideal.
3. *Samarpana Buddhi* : We should always dedicate all our actions to something that is higher than us. We should remember that the entire universe is operating in a spirit of *yajna*. Whatever we own is material that is in the service of the *yajna*, it is not ours.
4. *Asanga Buddhi* : We should constantly assess whether we are attached to any material object, person, emotion, position or action. In other words, we should analyze our relationship with those things to understand whether we give so much importance to a thing that we cannot do without it. We should also remember that everything is the *gunaas* acting on the *gunaas*. Therefore, we should work with no expectation of the future, and no burden of the past.
5. *Prasaada Buddhi* : While we perform actions, we should not keep an eye on the result. We should accept every result as a "*prasaada*". If we get attached to one type of result, whether it be positive or negative, the opposite or the complement of that result will torture us and bind us.



Jnyana Karma Sanyaasa Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 4**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**imam vivasvate yogam proktavaanahamavyayam |
vivasvaan manave praaha manurikshvaakavebraveet || 1 ||*

imam : this
 vivasvate : to Vivasvaan
 yogam : yoga
 proktavaan : declared
 aham : I had
 avyayam : imperishable
 vivasvaan : Vivasvaan
 manave : to Manu
 praaha : told
 manuh : Manu
 ikshvaaku : to Ikshvaaku
 abraaveet : told

Shree Bhagavaan said: I had declared this imperishable yoga to Vivasvaan. He told it to Manu, and Manu told it to Ikshvaaku.

In this first shloka of the fourth chapter, Shri Krishna gives the parampara, or the tradition, of the knowledge of the Gita. When any ancient texts are revealed, their tradition or heritage is also revealed. However, Shri Krishna first says that this teaching is imperishable. It always existed and can never be destroyed.

Shri Krishna then begins the parampara. He says that had revealed the same knowledge a long time ago to Vivasvaan. Vivasvaan means the sun. The name Vivasvaan is derived from the sanskrit root vasa meaning one who resides very well, or also, one who illumines everyone. The sun can be considered the first student of karmayoga. Not only does he selflessly provide light to the world, he also never gets tired doing so.

The sun then gave this knowledge to Manu. Manu is the original ancestor, and is considered to be the first human being from whom all humans originated, like Adam in the Bible. Hence humans are called manu-shya.

Manu then gave this knowledge to Ikshvaaku, who was the first king in the solar dynasty or the "soorya-vansh". All these kings were kshatriyas or warriors. Shri Krishna highlights this point in order to make Arjuna, a warrior himself, better appreciate the teaching.

Now, Arjuna had a doubt. How could Shri Krishna, his best friend, have provided this knowledge to the sun? Arjuna will ask this question shortly. But first, Shri Krishna explained the need to resurrect this very ancient knowledge in the next shloka.

Notes

1. The symbolic interpretation of this shloka could be taken as follows: Vivasvaan is the light or the eternal essence that shines through the intellect. Manu is the mind. Ikshvaaku is the senses. Therefore, the eternal essence pervades the body, mind and intellect.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 4

*evam paramparaapraaptamimam raajarshayo viduh |
sa kaaleneha mahataa yogo nashtah parantapa || 2 ||*

**In this way, scholar-kings knew about this yoga through tradition,
(but) through the long passage of time, this yoga has been lost here,
O scorcher of foes.**

evam : in this way
paramparaapraaptam : obtained
through tradition
imam : this
raajarshayo : scholar-king
viduh : known
sah : that
kaalena : through passage of time
iha : here
mahataa : long
yogah : yoga
nashtah : vanished
parantapa : O scorcher of foes

Shri Krishna gives Arjuna the reason for resurrecting the Gita in this shloka. He begins by stating that this knowledge has come from teacher to student. If we trace it back to its roots, we will find that the cosmic intelligence is the origin of this knowledge. This illustrates a beautiful aspect of the spiritual tradition: no one person claims authorship of knowledge. Even Tulsidas asserted that he did not write the Ramayana, but that it came from Lord Shiva.

When any teaching passes from generation to generation, the original message gets distorted. Shri Krishna says that even though this knowledge was prevalent in ancient times, is become distorted due to the long passage of time. Sant Jnyaneshwar in his commentary states that the distortion was further compounded by people becoming more materialistic and extroverted over the passage of time.

One example of distortion is musical raagaas. The raagas that we hear today are but a distorted version of the original raagas. Another example is that of rain water. When rain water falls from the sky, it is extremely pure like distilled water. But as it falls to the ground, it gets contaminated with pollutants in the air, dust and so on. We have to process that water in order to make it potable.

Therefore, now and then someone has to come to refresh the original message of the Gita, and that is what Shri Krishna is doing now. But he also needs to communicate it to the right person so that the message is properly understood. He addresses this point in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 4

*sa evaayam mayaa te dya yogah proktah puraatanaha |
bhaktosi me sakhaa cheti rahasyam hyetaduttamam || 3 ||*

That same ancient yoga I have taught you now, for you are my devotee and my friend. This (yoga) is the ultimate secret.

Shri Krishna very affectionately tells Arjuna that he regards him as a devotee and a friend, and finds him fit and capable to receive this supreme knowledge. Arjuna was of course quite happy to receive it, but why was he chosen? Let us investigate this point further.

Whoever received this knowledge needed to be capable of communicating it to others. It was not enough that this person was wise. Shri Krishna also needed a capable evangelist, one who had a mix of sattva and rajas, in order to both understand and spread this knowledge. A brahmana is predominantly saattvic by nature, and may not have been able to communicate and establish this knowledge in the world. Therefore Shri Krishna revealed this knowledge to Arjuna, the ultimate kshatriya warrior.

Moreover, Arjuna was Shri Krishna's devotee and friend. He had the best rapport with Shri Krishna, as well as profound reverence for him. So much so that Arjuna confided his fears to him in the first chapter, something that a kshatriya would hesitate to do. Arjuna also had the courage to ask any doubts without any fear of reprimand, and in doing so get a clear understanding of the teaching.

Many commentators believe that the 108 shlokas starting from shloka 11 of chapter 2 to this shloka comprise the entire message of the Gita. They say that Shri Krishna essentially completed the entire teaching and stopped speaking, having provided the parampara as the conclusion. The remainder of the Gita is an exposition of the teachings packed into these 108 shlokas. And it is Arjuna who helps us dig deeper into these teachings with his well-timed and thoughtful questions, like the one we will see in the next shloka.

sah : that
eva : same
ayam : this
mayaa : I have
te : to you
adya : now
yogah : yoga
proktah : taught
puraatanaha : ancient
bhaktah : devotee
asi : you are
me : my
sakhaa : friend
cha: and
iti : that is why
rahasyam : secret
hi : because
etat : this
uttamam : ultimate

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 4**Arjuna uvaacha:**aparam bhavato janma param janma vivasvataha |
kathametadvijaaniyaam tvamaadau proktavaaniti || 4 ||*

Arjuna said: Your birth is in the present, and the sun's birth was in the past. How should I understand that you had taught this (yoga) in the beginning?

Having heard that Shri Krishna taught karmayoga to the sun, Arjuna had a doubt. How could Shri Krishna have revealed this knowledge to the sun? The sun came first before even the earth came into existence. But Shri Krishna was only a little older than Arjuna, so how does one reconcile this fact?

Therefore, Arjuna requested Shri Krishna to clarify this point. Even the way he asked this question is very beautiful. He could easily have said "I don't believe you, how is this possible". Instead, he very humbly says "my mind cannot understand this point, please help me understand it". There is no accusation or finger pointing of any sort here. It is asked with sincerity.

This question enables Shri Krishna to reveal his true identity to Arjuna in the next shloka.

aparam : in the present
bhavatah : you
janma : birth
param : in the past
janma : birth
vivasvataha : the sun
katham : how should
etat : this
vijaaniyaam : understand
tvam : you
aadau : in the beginning
proktavaan : had taught
iti : this

Notes

1. Arjuna has referred to Shri Krishna as bhavataha (respected you, or "aap" in hindi) and tvam (friendly you or "tum" in hindi), further highlighting the reverence and friendliness towards Shri Krishna.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 4**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**bahooni me vyateetaani janmaani tava chaarjuna |
taanyaham veda sarvaani na tvam vettha parantapa || 5 ||*

bahooni : many
 me : mine
 vyateetaani : have happened
 janmaani : births
 tava : your
 cha : and
 arjuna : Arjuna
 taani : those
 aham : I
 veda : know
 sarvaani : all of them
 na : do not
 tvam : you
 vettha : know
 parantapa : scorcher-of-foes

Shree Bhagavaan said: You and I have have undergone many births, O Arjuna. I know all of those (births), but you do not know them, O scorcher-of-foes.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna begins to reveal his divine nature to Arjuna. Previously, Arjuna raised a doubt as to how did Shri Krishna convey the Gita teaching to the sun. Shri Krishna responds by pointing out the similarity as well as the difference between his birth and Arjuna's birth. The similarity is that both Arjuna and Shri Krishna have taken many births in the past.

However, the difference is that Shri Krishna had the knowledge and memory of all his prior births, whereas Arjuna did not. Normally, human beings have such strong identification with their body that it restricts their ability to remember what occurred in another body. We even tend to forget events associated with our own body with the passage of time, including simple things like where we kept our keys in the morning.

So if Shri Krishna could recall what happened in all his births, he did not have any identification to his body, and therefore he is not restricted by its limitations. He was speaking as an enlightened being who realized the eternal essence and has dropped identification with his body. But there is more to Shri Krishna than just this aspect. He will reveal more in the next shloka.

Notes

1. How does the Gita treat the topic of rebirth? Our vaasanaas force us to take a birth in a body. If we chose to use the birth to exhaust those vaasanaas, then the cycle of rebirth is broken. But if we chose to use the birth to accumulate more vaasanaas, then we will be forced to take another birth to exhaust the newly acquired vaasanaas. Only by cleansing our vaasanaas can we break the cycle of rebirth or "samsaara".

Bhagavad Gita Verse 6, Chapter 4

*ajopi sannavyayaatmaa bhootaanaameeshvaropi san |
prakritim svaamadhishthaaya sambhavaamyaatmamaayayaa || 6 ||*

ajaha : beyond birth
api : yet
san : though
avyayaatmaa : imperishable
bhootaanaam : among all beings
eeshvaraah : controller
san : though
prakritim : nature
svaam : my
adhishthaaya : commanding
sambhaavami : I manifest
aatmamaayayaa : with my maaya

Though I am beyond birth, imperishable and the controller of all beings, yet by commanding my nature, I manifest with my maaya.

This is an important shloka in the Gita, because Shri Krishna reveals himself as Ishvara, the controller of all beings. He says he is not born into this world like an ordinary human. He wills himself or manifests himself into existence by controlling prakriti, which is made up of the 3 gunaas. The power that causes this manifestation is called maaya. Let us look at two examples to understand this concept further.

Our body has billions of cells that carry out a wide range of functions. Each of these cells behave independently. But they are all working for an entity - the person - who is much larger and powerful than all of them put together.

Also consider the wave and the ocean. There are many waves, but all of them are part of a gigantic entity called the ocean. The ocean contains all the waves on the surface, as well as a vast quantity of water that lies under the surface. The wave derives its power from the ocean, but the ocean is more powerful than any one wave.

Similarly, the entire universe is the body of the supreme person known as Ishvara, who is the controller of the universe and the most powerful entity in existence. We are like waves that derive our power from the ocean called Ishvara. The power of Ishvara can be seen in the laws of nature, especially when we see cosmic phenomenon like a supernova explosion. The intelligence of Ishvara can be seen in the harmony of the universe, when we see the vast cosmos with stars, planets, the sun and so on.

Prakriti is related to both us and Ishvara but in different ways. While we are usually under the control of prakriti (the 3 gunaas), it is Ishvara that controls prakriti. It is like a wild horse controlling its rider versus an experienced jockey controlling a race horse. But both Ishvara and us are nothing but the eternal essence, just like the wave and ocean are made up of water. When the eternal essence identifies with a finite body, it is a jeeva. When it identifies with the entire universe, it is

Ishvara.

Having grasped the concept of Ishvara, let us now look at the concept of "avataar" or manifestation. Let's say a small rat tries to invade a large ant colony. Immediately, the entire ant colony springs into action. It is as if there is an "ant colony intelligence" that commands ants to collectively attack the rat in order to protect the ant colony. There was no "birth" of that collective attack, it manifested in response to a situation, and ended as soon as the situation was dealt with.

Similarly, Ishvara has the ability to manifest in the universe. The manifestation could be a short-lived one, like one thought in a person's mind. It could also be long-living manifestation like a human being in the form of Shri Krishna. Our Puraanic literature describes several avataaras in great detail, but these are only a subset of the countless avataaras that take place over time. An avataara is like a rain-bearing cloud: it materializes out of thin air, does its work, and quietly disappears.

So why does Ishvara need to take an avataara? Shri Krishna covers this topic in the next two oft-quoted shlokas of the Gita.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 4

*yadaa yadaa hi dharmasya glaanirbhavati bhaarata |
abhyutthaanamadharmaasya tadaatmaanam srijaamyaham || 7 ||*

Whenever there is a decline in righteousness, and a rise in unrighteousness prevails, then do I manifest myself, O Bhaarata

yadaa yadaa hi: whenever
dharmasya : righteousness
glaanih : decline
bhavati : prevails
bhaarata: O Bhaarata
abhyutthaanam : rise
adharmaasya : unrighteousness
tadaa : then
aatmaanam : myself
srijaami : manifest

aham : I

Shri Krishna described the process of Ishvara's descent or avataara in the previous shloka. Here he speaks about the reason for manifesting as an avataara. He says that whenever there is a decay in dharma, and a rise in adharma, during that time he manifests himself in a particular form in this world. Now dharma means righteousness, but it also means universal harmony. Adharma then becomes disharmony.

Again, let us take the example of our body. Every cell and organ is working for the totality of the human being. It is the spirit of "one for all and all for one", which is nothing but the spirit of yajna that we saw earlier. Our heart keeps beating and doesn't ask for any reward or recognition. It just works for the sake of totality.

But sometimes, a part of the body, or the whole body, undergoes a situation when something goes wrong. Then, the intelligence of the body manifests itself to take care of the situation. If the problem is in one part of the body then special enzymes are secreted to remedy the situation, and white blood cells fight off the invaders. If the problem is in the whole body then it becomes warm under fever in order to get rid of intruders.

Similarly Ishvara comes either for short time like the Narasimha avataara, or for a long time like Shri Krishna avataar. Sometimes we find that the entire population thinks the same thought - e.g. an independence struggle or a social movement. That is also an avataara. If we go on polluting the environment with chemicals and so on, there could be a natural disaster in response. That is also an avataara .

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 4

*paritraanaaya saadhoonaam vinaashaaya cha dushkritaam |
dharmasansthaapaanaarthaaya sambhavaami yuge yuge || 8 ||*

paritraanaaya : protection
saadhoonaam : good
vinaashaaya : destruction
cha : and
dushkritaam : wicked
dharmasansthaapaanaa : establishment
of righteousness
arthaaya : for the purpose of
sambhavaami : I manifest
yuge yuge : in every age

**For the protection of the good, and the destruction of the wicked,
I manifest in every age to establish righteousness.**

Shri Krishna further explains why he manifests himself. He points out three reasons: protection of good people, destruction of wicked people, and establishment of dharma. This is not a one time occurrence. It happens continuously : "Yuge yuge" means in every age, but it also means at every juncture, every crisis where there is a conflict that can disturb the harmony of the universe.

Now, from our limited perspective, we may not be able to appreciate why, when or how this restoration happens. It will usually never happen for the benefit of a single individual, city, state or country. It will happen for the sake of the entire creation. And just like sometimes a part of the body needs to be amputated, it could manifest as a tornado or earthquake, causing tremendous destruction. We could also complain that why does not Ishvara manifest himself and fix all the ills of the world that are happening now. The manifestation happens only at the right time, and only when it serves the purpose of the entire universe.

Sant Jnyaneshwar comments elaborately about Ishvara's avataara. He very poetically says that the avataara destroys the kaajal (kohl) of ignorance and lights the lamp of wisdom in the world. Also, he says that even though Shri Krishna commands Maaya in order to manifest himself, he is neither the doer nor the enjoyer of the actions that he performs.

Having manifested in the world, and restored the balance of dharma or harmony, what happens next? Ishvara very quietly becomes unmanifest and lets prakriti take over, just like clouds disappear after rain, or a fever disappears after we recover from an illness.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 9, Chapter 4

*janma karma cha me divyamevam yo vetti tattvataha |
tyaktvaa deham punarjanma naiti maameti sorjuna || 9 ||*

My birth and action are divine. One who knows this in essence, having given up the body, is not born again; he obtains me, O Arjuna.

In the last two shlokas, Shri Krishna gave the reason for his avataara. Now the question arises: how does this knowledge help the spiritual seeker? He says that once we understand the secret of Ishvaraa's birth and action, we will understand the secret of our action as well.

What is the secret of Ishvaraa's birth and action? It looks to us that Ishvaraa is born, and that Ishvaraa performs action. But that is not the case. Through the power of Ishvaraa's Maaya, it only looks like Ishvaraa takes birth and performs action. It is just an illusion. As we have seen earlier, the eternal essence does not perform action, only prakriti - also called maaya - performs action.

Now, the jeeva within us is identified with the body, mind and intellect. Its birth is based on past karmaas. It performs karmaas with a sense of doership. In other words, it thinks that it is performing actions. But from the standpoint of the eternal essence, there is no doership or enjoyership. It is prakriti alone that acts. Just like Ishvaraa does not perform action, the jeeva also does not perform action. The jeeva is one with Ishvaraa.

So therefore, one who truly and completely understands this point will drop identification with his body, and begin identifying with the eternal essence. That is what is meant by the phrase "deham tvaktvaa": the jeeva has stopped identification of the body.

Here, academic knowledge is not enough. We need a first-hand understanding that prakriti performs actions and not the eternal essence. That first-hand understanding can only be gained through meditation, which is explained later in the Gita.

A simple way to understand the teaching so far is as follows. The individual jeeva is like a wave in the ocean. Ishvaraa is like the ocean. The eternal essence or brahman is water. Once the wave realizes that it

janma : birth
karma : action
cha : and
me : my
divyam : divine
evam : in this way
yah : one who
veti : knows
tattvataha : in essence
tyaktvaa : give up
deham : body
janma : rebirth
na : does not
eti : obtain
maam : me
eti : obtain
sah : he
arjuna : O Arjuna

is the same water as Ishvaraa, it is free from the limitations of its tiny form.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 4

*veetaraagabhayakrodhaa manmayaa maamupaashritaaha |
bahavo jnyaanatapasaa pootaa madbhaavamaagataaha || 10 ||*

Free from attachment, fear and anger, absorbed in me and taking refuge in me; many have been purified through the austerity of knowledge, and have attained my essence.

veeta : free from
raaga : attachment
bhaya : fear
krodhah : anger
maam-upaashritaaha : taking refuge in me
bahavaha : many have
jnyaana-tapasaa : through the austerity of knowledge
pootaaha : purified
mad-bhaavam : my essence
aagataaha : have attained

Shri Krishna concluded the topic of Ishvaraa and his avataara in the previous shloka. Having heard this, a question may arise as to how many individuals were successful in realizing the eternal essence by following the path laid out by Shri Krishna. He gives an encouraging answer to that question. He says that many people have attained the eternal essence following this path. They have become "manmayaa-haa" or one with him.

Many of us may have followed the teaching so far, and may have also understood the notion of karmayoga. Assuming that we follow it diligently, we would like to know what comes next in the spiritual journey. We can proceed further, but we cannot force it, just like one cannot go from high school to college without passing exams.

So in this shloka, Shri Krishna gives the roadmap to attaining the eternal essence. First, he advises us to follow the path of karmayoga so that our system is cleared of vaasanaas. It is the preparatory stage in the spiritual path, as we have seen earlier. As we become proficient in karmayoga, we slowly become free of attachment, fear and anger.

Next, as our vaasanaas become weaker, the force of our thought becomes more controlled. Our mind becomes purer, and consequently, becomes still. This enables us to better comprehend, contemplate upon and internalize the statements such as "I am the eternal essence". Traditionally, these stages are shravana (hearing the scriptures), manana (contemplating) and nidhidhyaasana (internalization).

This constant and continued attempt to achieve identification with the eternal essence through the three stages of shravana, manana and nidhidhyaasana is called "jnyaana tapas" or the austerity of knowledge. We should note that this knowledge is not the kind of academic knowledge that we are used to. It is the absence of ignorance caused by vasanaas, or in other words, absence of selfish thinking.

Notes

1. This shloka summarizes the three traditional paths of spirituality: karmayoga, bhaktiyoga (devotion) and jnyaanayoga (knowledge)

Finally, having been purified by the austerity of knowledge, we begin to attain an affectionate attitude towards Ishvaraa. This attitude of devotion makes us take ultimate refuge in Ishvaraa, indicated here by the word "maanupaashritaaha".

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 4

*ye yathaa maam prapadyante taanstathaiva bhajaamyaham |
mama vartmaanuvartante manushyaah paartha sarvashaha || 11 ||*

ye : one who
yathaa : in which manner
maam : me
prapadyante : approaches me
taan : him
eva : in that manner
bhajaami : favour them
aham : I
mama : my
vartam : path
anuvartante : follow
manushyaah : people
paartha : O Paartha
sarvashaha : in different ways

In whichever manner one approaches me, in that manner I favour them. People follow my path in different ways, O Paartha.

Earlier, Shri Krishna said that only those who take refuge in him realize the eternal essence and are liberated. On this note, a doubt may arise: Is he partial to those who take refuge in him, compared to those who do not? He advises us to be free of desires and aversions - isn't this an example of aversion towards those who do not take refuge in him?

Shri Krishna responds to this doubt in this shloka. First, he asserts that whenever we have a strong desire, whether it is a material one or a spiritual one, that desire reaches Ishvaraa. If we approach the world with a desire for a promotion in our career, or we want better health, that desire reaches Ishvaraa because the world is part of Ishvaraa. The world is a part of Ishvaraa, as we saw earlier.

Having learned of the desire, how does he respond to the request? He says that he treats all requests like an impersonal computer system. Whatever we input, similar will be the output. If someone truly and deeply desires a promotion, and works hard towards it, he will get it. Similarly, if someone truly and deeply desires moksha, or realization of the eternal essence, and puts in the effort, he will get it.

The power of Ishvaraa is impartial. It is without any prejudice or hatred, just like electricity. One may harness electricity to power a fan, to light a room, to watch television and so on. Electricity will never say "I do not like television, so I will not power it, but I will power the fan". Ishvaraa's actions are based on laws, just like the laws of nature.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 4

*kaankshantaha karmanaam siddhim yajanta iha devataaha |
kshipram hi maanushe loke siddhirbhavati karmajaa || 12 ||*

kaankshantaha : desiring
karmanaam : through actions
siddhim : results
yajante : worship
iha : this
devataaha : deities
kshipram : instant
hi : for
maanushe : human
loke : world
siddhih : success
bhavati : obtained
karmajaa : through action

Those who desire success in actions worship deities; for in this human world, results of action are obtained instantly.

We saw in the previous shloka that Ishvaraa is like an impartial computer system. He responds in the same manner in which people seek him. So then the question arises? Why don't people approach him for self-realization? Would they not get it if they ask him?

Shri Krishna says that most of us do not desire self-realization, we only desire material objects because they give us instant happiness. We have been conditioned to perform actions that get quick results. We make instant coffee and it gives us instant satisfaction. And when we want results that are beyond our immediate control, we approach and appease forces in nature that can grant us the result we need. These forces could be human beings - we may propitiate a local politician if we want to set up a business in a particular town.

But, not matter how satisfying the result is, it will only give us temporary happiness because we have approached a force of nature that is a subset of Ishvaraa. Ishvaraa is the ultimate force in nature. Only he can give us permanent happiness in the form of self-realization.

Moreover, this permanent happiness is not a result of any outward actions. Actions performed in the spirit of karmayoga will no doubt help purify our mind. But the ultimate goal of self-realization is not the result of any outward action, it is only through the removal of ignorance in the form of selfish desire.

If we recall, "samarpana buddhi" or the wisdom of dedicating actions is one of the five main aspects of karmayoga. So therefore, these shlokas deal with the topic of Ishvaraa so that he will become the ultimate ideal to whom we can dedicate all our actions to.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 4

*chaaturvarnyam mayaa srishtam gunakarmavibhaagashaha |
tasya kartaaramapi maam viddhyakartaaramavyayam || 13 ||*

chaatur : four
varnyam : classes
mayaa : by me
srishtam : created
guna : guna
karma : action
vibhaagashaha : division
tasya : that
kartaaram : being the doer
api : even though
maam : me
viddhi : know
akartaaram : non-doer
avyayam : imperishable

Four classes have been created by me, based on the division of guna and action. Even though I created them, know me as the non-doer and imperishable.

Earlier, Shri Krishna mentioned that humans cannot avoid action at any cost. So how can we achieve liberation from bondage while still performing action? To that end, Shri Krishna advises us to act per our svadharma. By efficiently performing svadharma, we can liberate ourselves while performing actions. This is the "why" of karmayoga.

Knowing that one should perform one's svadharma or duty in this world is core to karmayoga. But how does one know what is one's svadharma? Shri Krishna addresses this point briefly in this shloka. He says that human beings are categorized into four classes or varnaas. These classes are based on the 3 gunaas, and the corresponding action that each guna prompts us to do.

The three gunas and their corresponding actions are as follows. Rajas is expressed as activity or agitation. Tamas is expressed as lethargy or laziness. Sattva is expressed as knowledge and peace. So we have to perform self-analysis in order to understand how the gunaas behave within us and in what proportion to each other.

We will find that we will fall into one of these four categories. A brahmana who is predisposed to gaining knowledge, faith, sharing knowledge will usually have a prominence of sattva. A kshatriya who demonstrates courage, likes to organize and protect people, face challenges, take risks, try new things will have a prominence of sattva and rajas. A vaishya who likes to be creative and produce something will have a prominence of rajas and tamas. A shudra who likes to execute tasks but requires a lot of motivation will have prominence of tamas.

As we can tell, this shloka was heavily misinterpreted to support the incorrect notion that varna is determined by birth. There is no such thing. Just like we have career counselling in modern times, the Gita offered a scientific manner of selecting a career that is suitable for oneself both from a practical perspective, and also from a karma yoga

perspective.

In the second part of the shloka, Shri Krishna reminds us that although he has set up this classification of varnaa, he is not the doer even in this act. It is maayaa alone that is acting in this world, whereas he is only the witness to its actions. We can think of ourselves as playing different parts in a cosmic play. Each part is different based on our svadharma.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 4

*na maam karmaani limpanti na ma karmaphale spruhaa |
iti maam yo bhijaanaati karmabhirna sa badhyate || 14 ||*

Actions do not stain me, nor do I covet fruits of action. One who knows me in this manner is never bound by actions.

So far, Shri Krishna clarified and elaborated upon key topics within karmayoga. First he gave the parampara or tradition of the teaching. He then revealed his nature as Ishvaraa, and explained the method by which he manifests as an avataara. Finally, he explained how he responds in the exact manner that one approaches him.

As we get further into karmayoga, we slowly begin to lose our attachment to the fruits of our action, which is the first stage in karmayoga. In this chapter, Shri Krishna urges us to move to the next stage in this journey where we begin to lose the notion of doership. To highlight this point, Shri Krishna says that as Ishvaraa, even he knows that actions are happening in prakriti, and therefore he is not the doer of those actions, but he is beyond all action. He puts this poetically by saying that actions do not "stain" him.

Why is Ishvara beyond all action? At its core, any action happens when there is an imbalance or vacuum. Wind travels from high pressure areas to low pressure areas. Electric current moves when there is a difference in voltage. The mind creates a thought because of our vaasanaas. But Ishvara is all-complete and self-sufficient. Therefore, he does not need to act. He is only a witness.

If there is a reflection of the sun in a pond, and if dirt is thrown on the pond, the sun is not stained by that dirt. Similarly, since actions are performed by prakriti, there is no impact to Ishvaraa. In this and other shlokas of this chapter, Shri Krishna reminds us that just like he knows that he is not the doer or enjoyer of actions, so should we have the exact same conviction.

na : do not
maam : me
karmaani : action
limpanti : stain
na : not
ma : I
karmaphale : fruits of action
spruhaa : covet
iti : in this manner
maam : me
yo : one who
abhijaanaati : knows in essence
karmabhih : with actions
na : not
sah : he
badhyate : bound

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 4

*evam jnaatvaa kritam karma poorvairapi mumukshubhihi |
kuru karmaiva tasmaattvam poorvaih poorvataram kritam || 15 ||*

Even seekers of freedom, having known this (path of karmayoga), performed actions since ancient times. Therefore, so do you perform actions like the ancients did.

Previously, Shri Krishna explained that one who knows him as distinct from performer and enjoyer of actions is not bound. Now, he reaffirms that teaching by informing Arjuna that many ancient seekers of freedom have followed the path of karmayoga.

These ancient seekers understood that the "I" is the eternal essence. It is not the doer and does not have anything to gain from results of actions. So they continued to perform actions, dedicating them to the highest ideal which is Ishvaraa, and purified their minds doing so.

Shri Krishna also re-emphasizes that this teaching did not deter the ancient seekers from performing actions, in other words, they did not abandon their duties and retire to the forest. They continued to work in the world but maintained the karmayoga attitude.

By pointing out the heritage of karmayoga, Shri Krishna constantly reminded Arjuna that this is not a brand new teaching, it always was a way of life but was lost due to the passage of time.

evam : this manner
jnaatvaa : having known
kritam : performed
karma : actions
poorvaih : since ancient times
api : even
mumukshubhihi : seekers of freedom
kuru : perform
karma : actions
eva : those
tasmaat : therefore
tvam : you
poorvaih : ancestors
poorvataram : since ancient times
kritam : actions

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 4

*kim karma kimakarmeti kavayopatra mohitaaha |
tatte karma pravakshyaami yajnyaatvaa mokshyaseshubhaat || 16 ||*

What is action and what is inaction? Seers are deluded in this regard. To you, I will explain that action, by knowing which you will gain liberation from this inauspicious (nature of samsara).

As we continue to move forward in the Gita, we comes across milestones where Shri Krishna takes us from one level of understanding to a more advanced level. With this shloka, Shri Krishna alerts us that the upcoming shlokas will give us a much deeper understanding of the topic of karma or action.

Let us recap what we have learned so far about action and inaction. Action or karma as defined by Shri Krishna is any activity performed with a selfish motive. Inaction or akarma is defined as any activity performed in a selfless manner. In other words, with a yajnya spirit. It is important to revise these definitions because Shri Krishna says that even intelligent people very easily get confused by this terminology, since action typically means any activity and inaction means absence of activity.

Why is this topic important? Unless our intellect fully understands and gets the conviction that we can achieve self-realization through performance of action, we will again and again fall prey to the wrong notion that we should renounce everything.

This is evident in our daily lives. Whenever we feel pressure at our job, we start thinking about changing jobs. If we have to resolve a delicate issue impacting our friends or relatives, we may try to defer or avoid it altogether rather than addressing it. We have an inbuilt tendency to avoid performing actions, even though all our bodies can do is perform action. Therefore, Shri Krishna wants us to have a thorough understanding of the nature of action so that it becomes a part of our life, than something that we just read about.

kim : what is
karma : action
kim : what is
akarma : inaction
iti : this
kavayaha : seers
atra : in this regard
mohitaaha: are deluded
tat : that
te : you
karma : action
pravakshyaami : explain
yat : that which
jnyaatvaa : knowing
mokshyase : gain liberation
ashubhaat : from this inauspicious

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 4

*karmeno hyaapi boddhavyam boddhavyam cha vikarmanaha |
akarmanashcha boddhavyam gahano karmano gatihi || 17 ||*

(The meaning of) Action should be known, forbidden action should be known, and also inaction should be known, for inexplicable is the course (nature) of action.

karmanaha : action
hi : for
api : also
boddhavyam : should be known
cha : and
vikarmanaha: forbidden action
akarmanaha : inaction
cha : and
gahanaa : inexplicable
karmanah : action
gatihi : course

Shri Krishna is going deeper into the definition of karma in this shloka. Previously, we examined the meaning of karma as selfish actions, and akarma as unselfish actions. Now let's look at what is meant by vikarma. Vikarma or forbidden action refers to any action that is not prescribed in one's svadharma. We need to use our intellect to determine what is vikarma based on our individual situation.

For example, one could be a vaishya (businessman). His duty is to conduct business and use the earnings for benefit of family and for the benefit society as a whole. There is absolutely no harm if he wants to earn more and more wealth. It is absolutely ok as long as he is using it for the benefit of family and society.

But if one is a student, his goal should be to diligently acquire knowledge. If his attention is diverted towards acquiring more girlfriends, that becomes vikarma. The key point here is that no outside entity can tell someone what their svadharma is. It has to come from within, from deep self examination and analysis.

Having examined the definitions of karma, akarma and vikarma, let us know go one step further and understand karma at a much deeper level. Shri Krishna gently warns us that we need to put forth effort to have a correct understanding of this topic, because it is hard to comprehend. Karma is a reaction produced by nature in response to our relationship to it.

Firstly, let us understand what is mean by our relationship to nature. It goes back to our thoughts and our motives. If we are motivated by a selfish spirit, nature will give us a negative reaction, just like electricity gives us a shock if we handle it improperly. Conversely, if we are motivated by a spirit of cooperation and selflessness, we will not get that negative reaction from nature.

Why so? Because we have seen earlier that the spirit of yajna is embedded in nature itself. Prakriti or nature is moving with the yajna spirit, and we are part of nature itself. So therefore, if our thoughts and feelings - not just our actions - are "in tune" with nature and the spirit of yajna, we will not accumulate negative reactions or karma.

Next, let us understand where these reactions come from. They do not come from some outside agency that constantly monitors our actions and gives us karma "points". These reactions come from nature itself. Nature is like a mirror - if you smile at it, it smiles right back. We have all heard the saying "what goes around comes around". That is karma.

So what does it mean for us from a practical perspective? We have to constantly use our viveka or discrimination to ensure our thoughts and feelings are working in the spirit of yajna. If our thoughts are unselfish, so too will our actions be unselfish. Otherwise, we will go on accumulating karma which gets lodged in our personality as vaasanaa, which is the very thing that stands between us and self-realization.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 4

*karmanyakarma yaha pashyedakarmani cha karma yaha |
sa buddhimaanmanushyeshu sa yuktaha kritsnakarmakrit || 18 ||*

One who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, he is wise among all people, he is well integrated and accomplishes his actions.

Now, having understood the deeper meaning of karma, let us look at the most crucial shlokas of this chapter. Shri Krishna employs his poetic prowess to teach us how to apply the knowledge of karma to our actions. He uses the words karma and akarma (action and inaction) differently in different parts of the shloka, so let us take it part by part.

First, let us understand what is meant by "seeing inaction in action". The word action in this phrase refers to activity of any sort: thinking, feeling, working. To be clear, even thinking a thought is action. And the word "inaction" here refers to the constant awareness that the eternal essence, our self, is inactive, and not the doer of action. It means complete detachment from the work and detachment from a sense of agency or doership, because the mind has now attached itself to a higher ideal.

So therefore, one who sees inaction in action knows that his every activity is happening out of prakriti or nature. His true identity is the eternal essence that neither does any action nor enjoys the result of any action. From a practical standpoint, it refers to the attitude that we have towards our work. It is the difference between a worker who can perform tough tasks and not feel tired, and the worker who feels that every minute of his work is a burden.

Next, let us look at the phrase "seeing action in inaction". The word action in this phrase refers to the ego, the notion that "I am the doer" as well as the sense of agency in the work. And the word "inaction" refers to absence of activity. So for example, if someone needs help crossing the road and we think "I won't help him because I will be late for my bus". Behind our absence of helping someone cross the road is a selfish motive. Similarly, if we hold back on admitting a mistake that we had committed, our absence of admitting our guilt is driven by a selfish motive. This is seeing action in inaction.

karmani : in action
akarma : inaction
yaha : one who
pashyet : sees
akarmani : in inaction
cha : and
karma : action
yaha : who
saha : he is
buddhimaan : wise
manushyeshu : among people
saha : he is
kritsnakarmakrit : accomplishes all actions

Shri Krishna then goes on to say that one who constantly uses his discrimination to eliminate all sense of doership from every action - that person is wise and is well integrated in the yajna spirit. That person will accomplish any task that he takes up without fail. His success is guaranteed.

The following four shlokas describe the attributes of such an integrated person, similar to the characteristics of a wise person from the second chapter.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 4

yasya sarve samaarambhaahaa kaamasankalpavarjitaaha |
jnyaanagnidhakarmaanaam tamaahuh panditam budhaaha || 19 ||

One who begins all actions devoid of desire and resolve, and whose actions have been burnt in the fire of knowledge, he is called a sage (even) by the wise.

yasya : one who
 sarve : all
 samaarambhaahaa : initiates actions
 kaama-sankalpa-varjitaaha : devoid of
 desire and resolve
 jnyaan-agnidha-karmaanaam : actions
 have been burnt in the fire of knowledge
 tam : he is
 aahuh : called
 panditam : sage
 budhaaha : by the wise

In the following six shlokas, Shri Krishna gives us extremely practical guidelines to fully internalize the message of this chapter, which is that only by renouncing the sense of doership and enjoyership can one achieve detachment from action. They are simple, clear, actionable messages.

Imagine that we are about to undertake on a new project that is part of our field of work, our svadharma. It could be a presentation at work, a new job, moving to a new city and so on. At each step of the project, our mind entertains different questions. We can use this series of shlokas as a guide throughout the project.

Initially, our mind is fully focused on executing the project in the spirit of karma yoga. But after a while, it will get distracted and tend to wander towards material objects. This distraction will eventually lead to lack of efficiency in our project. Shri Krishna addresses how to deal with this aspect of the mind.

The common meaning of the word "sankalpa" is decision or resolve. Let's examine the deeper meaning. Whenever we think about an object, there is a constant labelling going on in our mind on whether the object is "good" or "bad". After having gone back and forth, we label something as "good". This labelling is called sankalpa.

Why does this labelling happen? It is because our intellect has been superseded by our mind and senses. For example, a bitter medicine may benefit the body holistically. The intellect knows this. But the sense of taste will not like it. Furthermore, this sankalpa or labelling gives rise to kaama, or desire for that object. And herein lies the seed of selfish action that distracts us from the goal. Sankalpa and kaama are interrelated, any one of them indicates the presence of the other, but both give rise to selfish action.

Therefore, Shri Krishna urges us to "burn" our selfish actions with the fire of knowledge. In other words, he wants our intellect to guide us in our svadharma, and stop the mind from labelling objects as good or bad. If something comes to us as part of our svadharma, we must accept it with prasaada buddhi. Like the lotus that remains in the pond and is untouched by the water, we must continually remind ourselves that our eternal essence is different and separate from all actions. Actions are going on by themselves in nature. Therefore, we should remain alert at all times, and should reinstate the supremacy of the intellect over the senses whenever the senses move towards external objects.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 4

*tyaktvaa karmaphalaasanga nityatripto niraashrayaha |
karmanyabhivavrittapi naiva kinchitkaroti saha || 20 ||*

Having given up attachment to the result of action, always content and depending on nothing, he never does anything, though engaged in action.

tyaktvaa : having given up
karma-phala-asanga : attachment to
result of action
nityatriptah : always content
niraashrayaha : depending on nothing
karmani : in action
abhivavrittaha : engaged in action
api : even when
na : not
eva : ever
kinchit : any
karoti : do
saha : he

"When this project ends, will it give me everlasting happiness?" is the question that we ask, explicitly or implicitly, whenever we commence any new endeavour. In this shloka, Shri Krishna says that everlasting happiness and contentment is a natural byproduct of karma yoga itself, not of any one particular project. Contentment becomes part of our personality. The word used to describe this state is "nityatriptah".

As we grow up, we are programmed and conditioned by the world to believe that happiness is something that is outside of us. This conditioning goes deep inside our psyche and causes us to run after a better job, more money, a bigger house and so on. Now, it is absolutely alright to pursue growth while performing one's svadharma. Wealth follows naturally if one follows svadharma sincerely. But constant seeking of happiness from external objects makes us slavishly dependent upon the world.

What is so wrong about this seemingly normal tendency to look outside oneself for happiness? Because any happiness gained from the world will be finite and temporary. But Shri Krishna says here that if one dependent on the eternal essence instead, he becomes ever content. As the second chapter says: "naabhaavo vidyate sataha". The self is infinite and eternal.

Through karmayoga, we lose our attachment to the results of our actions. In doing so, we become less dependent on external world for happiness. Shri Krishna asks us to use our discrimination to examine the source of our happiness. We should train our mind to check daily whether we have gone outside ourselves to search for happiness, or is it coming from within.

Furthermore, if we are attached to the result of our action, we generate a expectation for the future. Which means that we identify ourselves with the process of time, which is also a part of prakriti. Identification

with time accumulates karma or negative reaction from the universe.

So therefore, one who does not create expectation of a result in the future does not accumulate karma. This is what is meant by the phrase "never does anything" in the shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 21, Chapter 4

*niraasheeryatachittaamaa tyaktasarvaparigraha |
shaareeram kevalam karma kurvannaapnoti kilbisham || 21 ||*

Without expectation, with a subdued body and mind, giving up all possessions, performing actions only for (maintaining) the body, he does not incur sin.

niraasheehi : without expectation
yatachittaamaa : subdued body and mind
tyaktasarvaparigraha : given up all possessions
shaareeram : body-related
kevalam : only
karma : actions
kurvan : performing
na apnoti : does not incur
kilbisham : sin

As we proceed with our project, our mind is racing with thoughts and anxieties about the future - will this happen, will that happen, what will go wrong and so on. But when we enter a peaceful place like a temple or a library, we notice that our thoughts tend to quiet down. This is because the sights, smells and sounds of such places put a fence around our mind and senses, as it were, and cause them to brood over a higher ideal. So Shri Krishna urges us to contemplate upon a higher ideal as much as possible. When that happens, our mind and our body automatically become quiet and subdued.

Now, in the course of the project, we may end up creating certain objects - a huge report, an excel file, a powerpoint presentation, a cutting-edge invention and so on. The wealth generated from the project will enable us to buy a new house, car, TV etc. We may notice that we develop a strong attachment, a strong sense of possessiveness towards these objects. Our ego may get inflated because we think that we created them, or own them. But that attitude makes us slaves of those objects. The reality is that nature produced the raw materials, as well as the knowledge to convert those into these objects. We did not "do" anything.

It has to be noted that there is no need to give up possessions. That is not the meaning here. Our attitude towards our possessions should be like a renter versus an owner. We should take care of possessions but not be bound to them. Slowly, as our possessive thinking diminishes, our actions also reduce. We then care only about our svadharma, and on keeping our mind and body fit for service.

The attitude created by observing this teaching has the effect of reducing the ego notion, which is nothing but the false identification of the eternal essence with the body, mind, intellect and objects.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 22, Chapter 4

*yadricchaaalaabhasantushto dvandvaateeto vimatsaraha |
samaha sidhhavasidhhau cha kritvaapi na nibhadyate || 22 ||*

Content in whatever comes of its own accord, transcending duality, free from envy, balanced in success and in failure, (he) is not bound even when performing actions.

yadricchaa-laabha-santushtaha : content
in what comes of its own accord
dvandva-ateetaha : transcending duality
vimatsaraha : free from envy
samaha : balanced
sidhhau : in success
asidhhau : in failure
cha : and
kritvaa : performing actions
api : even when
na : not
nibhadyate : bound

While progressing in our project, we may encounter several situations, some of which we expected and some that we did not. Shri Krishna guides us on how to deal with these situations in this shloka.

By definition, karma yoga inspires us to work relentlessly. The output of our project may be sometimes favourable, and sometimes not. The follower of karma yoga knows that he is one of the many variables that determine the output of his work, and is therefore content with whatever comes his way. He does not let unfavourable outcomes impact his level of work. This is the "prasaada buddhi" that we say earlier.

Favourable and unfavourable, success and failure, heat and cold, praise and criticism - this is duality. It arises because our minds tends to label one aspect of nature as positive, and reject the other as negative. But the follower of karma yoga knows that nothing is absolutely good or bad. It is all part of Ishvaraa and therefore remains equanimous. This is nothing but "samatva buddhi".

Our mind has a natural tendency to compare ourselves with others like us. If it perceives us "better" than others, it generates pride. If it perceives us "inferior" to others, it generates envy. The follower of karma yoga knows that ultimately we are all part of the same higher ideal - Ishvaraa. Any envy generated in the mind only strengthens the ego. So he never lets envy distract him from his work. It is a quality that he does not encourage.

So the refrain here is that such a follower of karma yoga will continue to perform actions in this world, yet remain unattached because he never lets external situations destabilize his equanimity.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 23, Chapter 4

*gatasangasya muktasya jnyaanavasthitachetasaha |
yajnaayaachaarataha karma samagram pravileeyate || 23 ||*

One who is unattached, who is liberated, who is established in knowledge, works for the sake of yajnya, his actions are completely dissolved.

gata-sangasya : one who is unattached
muktasya : one who is liberated
jnyaana-avasthita-chetasaha: one who is
established in knowledge
yajnaaya : for yajnya
aachaarataha : works
karma : actions
samagram : completely
pravileeyate : dissolved

What is the end result of following the practical tips given so far? Shri Krishna says that if we make the yajnya spirit a part of our life, rather than implement it only in work projects, it has the power to destroy all our vaasanaas. In this shloka, he tells Arjuna that for the person who is totally detached, free from attachments and established in the eternal essence, all of his accumulated karmaas melt away, like ice before the sun.

As we learned earlier, we perform selfish actions as a result of an unhealthy relationship with the world. Each such selfish action generates a negative reaction from the world which accumulates in our psyche as a karma. The way out of this predicament is correct knowledge, which is nothing but a healthy relationship with the world where all traces of selfishness are gone, where one works in a spirit of yajnya. This attitude of yajnya slowly makes us lose our identification with the body, mind, intellect and material objects. As our attachment goes away, we become liberated individuals.

Shri Krishna concludes the current topic of practical karmayoga advice by assuring us that the fire of knowledge burns the masses of karma that we have accumulated, provided that our actions are totally unselfish.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 24, Chapter 4

*brahmaarpanam brahma havirbrahmagnau brahmahata hatam |
brahmaiva tena gantavyam brahmakarmasamaadhinaa || 24 ||*

brahma : brahman
arpanam : oblation
havihi : offering
agnau : fire
hatam : act of offering
eva : only is
tena : that
gantavyam : attainment
karma : action
samaadhinaa : one absorbed in

Brahman is the oblation, brahman is the offering, brahman is the fire, brahman is the one who offers. One whose actions happen while absorbed in brahman, he only attains brahman.

Having given us a series of practical tips, Shri Krishna delivers yet another milestone shloka. If we truly perform all actions in this world with an attitude of yajnya, not just some actions, our vision of the world changes. In this shloka, Shri Krishna uses the ritual of a yajnya to paint a picture of what this ultimate vision looks like. We begin to see brahman, the eternal essence, in everything.

Six components of a yajnya ritual are pointed out here. The act of yajnya, the offering (usually butter or milk), the ladle used to submit the offering, the sacrificial flame, the person who performs the yajnya, and the goal that the person wishes to attain. Shri Krishna says that all six components of yajnya are nothing but the eternal essence.

This example can be interpreted from several perspectives. Let's first examine it from a purely physical perspective. The ladle is made of wood, which has come from the earth, and so has the offering. The person who performs the yajnya is created out of food, which also has come out of the earth. The flame and the act of yajnya are both manifestations of cosmic forces. Their ultimate cause can be traced back to the cosmic big bang. The goal has as a thought in the mind of the person, a mind that also has come from nature.

Now, how can we make it more concrete? Consider a computer programmer writing a software application. What should his vision become? The act of programming, the code he writes, the computer he uses to write the code, the software application that his code becomes a part of, his goal of writing good code, and the programmer himself - everything is the eternal essence. This is "brahma-drishhti" or the vision of brahman that is achieved while interacting in this world.

In many Indian households, people chant this shloka prior to eating a meal as a reminder that the food, the body and the act of eating - all are nothing but brahman.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 25, Chapter 4

*daivamevaapare yajnyam yoginaha paryupaasate |
brahmaagnauvapare yajnyam yajnenaivopajuhyati || 25 ||*

Some yogis also worship deities through devotion, other yogis engage in worship by offering the self into the sacrificial flame of the self.

daivam : deities
eva : also
apare : some
yajnyam : devotion
yoginaha : yogis
paryupaasate : worship
brahmaagnau : self in the form of
sacrificial flame
apare : others
yajnyam : worship
yajnena : self
upajuhyati : engage

In the last shloka, Shri Krishna gave us the ultimate vision of a karma yogi. This person thinks of brahman in everything and every action that he performs; it is 24/7, every second. For seekers who have just begin their journey, such a grand vision is difficult to consistently maintain. So in the following shlokas, Shri Krishna gives us simpler forms of worship for practice, so that we can ultimately build ourselves up to this grand vision.

For most of us it is difficult to comprehend the formless brahman. Therefore, many yogis worship a deity, in other words they invoke Ishvaraa in a particular idol or photograph. This offering of services to Ishvaraa is called "pooja". Now in pooja, imagination plays an important role. Just like children play the house house game - the better the imagination, better they enjoy it. The process of pooja helps us develop rapport with Ishvaraa.

Once we get into the habit of pooja, we then imagine Ishvaraa in every action that we perform. We can even imagine Ishvaraa in the form of our friend, brother, parents and so on. It helps us to purify our mind and reduce fear caused by our attachments. As our trust in Ishvaraa increases, our fear decreases and we become calmer.

In addition to seekers who worship Ishvaraa, there is another group of seekers that are more thought oriented and more contemplative. They strive to realize the formless brahman through inquiry, contemplation, meditation, and by understanding their oneness with brahman. This form of worship is called jnyaana saadhanaa or spiritual practice through knowledge. It is like the wave surrendering completely to the ocean to realize its oneness with the ocean.

As we study the different forms of yagnyas that we can practice, it is easy to get carried away by the variety and the details. But the key point to remember is this. Any action we perform as part of a yagnya

must not ever have even a tinge of expectation of result. If that happens, the yagnya becomes an ordinary, selfish action. The goal is to get better at these practice yagnyas so that we can bring that yagnya spirit into all actions in our daily life.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 26, Chapter 4

shrotraadeeneendriyaanyanye saiamaagnishu juhvati |
shabdaadeenvishayaananya indriyaagnishu juhvati || 26 ||

Other yogis offer hearing and other senses into the sacrificial flame of self-restraint. Yet others offer sense objects into the sacrificial flame of the senses.

shrotraadeeni : hearing and other
 indriyaani : senses
 anye : others
 saiamaagnishu : flame in the form of
 self-restraint
 juhvati : offer
 shabdaadeen : speech and other
 vishayaan : sense objects
 anya : yet others
 indriyaagnishu : flame in the form of
 senses
 juhvati : offer

Two more practical yajnyas are highlighted in this shloka by Shri Krishna. In the first yajnya, we use our discrimination to limit the activities of our senses. Symbolically, self control is like the fire to which the senses are offered.

The world comprises both good and bad influences. Our senses are exposed to thousands of such influences each day. If we keep senses open all the time without proper discrimination, so many negative influences would enter that it would take a lifetime to clean them up. Therefore, in this yajnya, we exercise our discretion over what we see, eat and hear everyday. Such withdrawal of energy from the senses is called pratyahaara. It is the fourth "limb" or aspect of yoga in the tradition of Patanjali, the first three being yama (restraint), niyama (positive restraint, covered in a later shloka) and aasana (steadying the body).

The Ramaayana illustrates this very well with the example of Raavana and Dasharatha. Raavana's ten heads are representative of the ten senses (5 sense organs + 5 organs of action). He was under such influence of his senses, he used them so much for enjoyment that they became ten heads. Conversely, Dasharatha exerted such control over his senses that they led him to his destination like a chariot (ratha).

The second yajnya is a more sophisticated version of the first yajnya. Instead of offering the senses to the fire of self restraint, the objects themselves, or more accurately, the notion of an object is sacrificed. We had come across the example of a gold jeweller who is only interested in the weight of the jewellery, regardless of how beautiful the ornament is. Similarly, advanced yogis sacrifice the notion that they are living in the world of objects. They recognize that objects are nothing but configurations of the same three cosmic forces: sattva, rajas and tamas. Like the jeweller, they "melt" the object so that it no longer draws their self outward.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 27, Chapter 4

*sarvaaneendriyakarmaani praanakarmaani chaapare |
aatmasaiyam yogagnau juvhati jnyaanadeepite || 27 |*

Others offer the activities of the senses and the activities of the life force into the flame of the discipline of self-restraint, kindled by knowledge.

sarvaani : all
indriya-karmaani : activities of the senses
praana-karmaani : activities of the life force
cha : and
apare : others
aatmasaiyam : self-restraint
yogagnau : flame in the form of discipline
juvhati : offer
jnyana : knowledge
deepite : kindled by

In prior shlokas, Shri Krishna gave us a variety of techniques to practice *yajnya*, from worship of a deity to more advanced techniques such as contemplation of the eternal essence, restraining movement of senses, and dissolving the notion of external objects altogether. In this shloka, he describes a technique for more advanced seekers where one not just restrains the senses, but also restrains the life forces or *praana* within our body. This discipline is the *raaja yoga* of Patanjali. It begins with the three limbs of *yama*, *niyama* and *aasana* that we saw in the previous shloka. Let us examine one key aspect of this technique, which is understanding of *praana*.

Praanaas are energy systems within our body that sustain physiological processes. There are five types of *praana* : *praana*, *apaana*, *udaana*, *vayaana* and *samaana*. Just like restraining the senses conserves energy that can be redirected towards advancing spiritually, so too can restraining the *praanaas* lead to the same outcome. However, this technique requires the guidance of a teacher and is not recommended for self-experimentation.

The senses and the *praanaas* are like rays of the sun emanating from our self. So as the *yogi* progresses in this *yajnya*, he regulates the *praanaas* using *praanaayaam*, the fifth limb of the *raaja yoga* technique which is described a later shloka. He then withdraws attention from senses and from the *praanas*, and redirects the energy towards concentration or *dhyaana* on the eternal essence, which is the sixth limb of Patanjali yoga. He then progresses to uninterrupted concentration or *dhaarana*, the seventh limb. Eventually, he attains direct perception of the eternal essence. This ultimate state is known as *samaadhi*, the eight and final limb of Patanjali yoga.

Knowing fully well that most of us need more basic techniques, Shri Krishna gives us a whole range of options in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 28, Chapter 4

*dravyayajnyaastapoyajnya yogayagnyaastathaapare |
svaadhyayagnyaanayagnyaashcha yatayaha sanshitavrataahaa || 28 ||*

Others offer sacrifice of materials, austerity and yoga, and other seekers with a resolute will offer the sacrifice of knowledge through study of scriptures.

dravya-yajnyaaha : material-sacrifice
tapo-yajnyaaha : austerity-sacrifice
yoga-yagnyaaha : yoga-sacrifice
tathaa : and
apare : others
svaadhyaya : study of scriptures
jnyaana-yagnyaaha : knowledge-sacrifice
cha : and
yatayaha : seekers
sanshita-vrataahaa : with resolute will

Shri Krishna gives us a choice of four more yajnyas in this shloka.

First, he talks about the sacrifice of wealth, or as it is more commonly known - charity. As we saw in the second chapter, lobha or the tendency to hoard can destabilize our mind, and strengthen the ego. Therefore, giving away wealth or even our time to a higher ideal checks this tendency to hoard. But charity has to be done with the attitude that I am giving away what was not mine to begin with. If one donates with a view to gain publicity and so on, that is a selfish or rajasic type of charity.

Secondly, Shri Krishna mentions austerity or tapas. In this type of yajnya, the urge of the sense organs to go out into the world is checked, so that the ego is weakened. There are three avenues for conducting tapas: the body, senses and mind. In physical tapas, we use the energy of our body to do seva or service the world. In sense-related tapas, we keep a strong leash on our senses and organs. For example, we can practice austerity on speech by always speaking truth, saying what's beneficial to someone, and creating disturbance in anybody's mind. In mental tapas, we control our mind by not giving attention to negative thoughts and emotions, and not letting others trigger such emotions in us.

Third, Shri Krishna gives us the option of practicing a detailed regimen of spiritual practice or yoga. It could be bhakti yoga (which we will see later), karma yoga, raaja yoga of Patanjali and so on.

Finally, we can practice study of the scriptures, which is also known as jnyaana yajnya. A daily reading of the Gita, Ramayana or any other such spiritual text with utmost attention, concentration, understanding and discipline is also a yajnya. Here also, the ego becomes weak because the intellect gains a firmer and stronger position in relation to the ego, strengthened by daily exposure to the scriptures.

The common thread of all the yajnyas mentioned is that of weakening the hold of the ego, which is nothing but weakening of the notion of "I-ness" and "mine-ness".

Bhagavad Gita Verse 29, Chapter 4

*apaane juvhati praanam praanepaanam tathaapare |
praanaapaanagati ruddhvaa praanaayaamaparaayanaaha || 29 ||*

Others offer the outward breath into the inward breath, and also the inward breath into the outward breath. Halting the movement of both these breaths, they constantly engage in praanaayaam.

apaane : outward breath
juvhati : offer
praanam : inward breath
praane : inward breath
apaanam : outward breath
tathaa : also
apare : others
praana-apaana-gati : movement of these breaths
ruddhvaa : halting
praanaayaam : praanaayaam
paraayanaaha : constantly engage in

In this shloka, Shri Krishna provides more detail around the use of praanaayaam as a form of yajnya. It is to be noted that it no practice of praanaayam should be undertaken without the supervision of a teacher, otherwise it can be harmful.

As we saw earlier, praanaas are the life energies within us that enable all our bodily functions including breathing, digestion, circulation and so on. Moreover, they function as the link between the mind and the body. We know that if our mind is upset all the time, our body develops psychosomatic illnesses due to the praanaas linking the mind and the body.

Since our mind and body are connected via the praanaas, we control the mind by controlling the praanaas. In praanaayaam, one regulates the breathing pattern (breathe in - retain - breathe out) as well as the time interval between each breath. This regulation has a direct impact on the mind. Even without studying pranaayaam, we can see that a few minutes of observing our normal breath helps to quieten the mind.

In this manner, Shri Krishna adds yet another yajnya to the list of yajnyas that one should pursue in order to gradually develop the ultimate vision that everything is the eternal essence.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 30, Chapter 4

*apare niyataaahaaraaha praanaanpraaneshu juhvati |
sarvepyete yajnyavido yajnyakshapitakalmashaaha || 30 ||*

apare : others
niyataaahaaraaha : regulate diet
juhvati : offer
sarve : all
api : also
ete : these
yajnyavidaha : knowers of sacrifice
yajnyakshapita : destroy through
sacrifice
kalmashaaha : sins

**Others regulate their diet, offering the life force into the life force.
All these (seekers) destroy sin through sacrifice, who are the knowers of sacrifice.**

In an earlier shloka, Shri Krishna spoke about the yajnya of regulating the quality of sensory intake. In this shloka, he describes a yajnya where one not only controls the quality of sensory intake but also the quantity. Although this is applicable to all senses such as smell, taste, sight and so on, let us consider one which is the simplest to understand: taste. Dieting becomes a form of yajnya.

By controlling or regulating the intake of food, we can control our mind. Our body and mind is ultimately made up of the food we consume. Later in the seventeenth chapter, Shri Krishna describes different types of food. For now, let us consider three main types. Saatvic food is that which is conducive to mind, which creates harmony in our system. Raajasic food makes us more active. It is usually spicy to taste. Taamasic food makes us dull, sleepy and sometimes intoxicated as well. It is food that has lost all its nutritional value, and is usually stale. It is also known as junk food.

On a subtler level, food also acquires the characteristics of how it has been prepared. At some level, we can always tell whether the food we eat has been mass produced, or has been made with care and attention. That is why many serious students of meditation will usually prepare their own food.

So therefore, Shri Krishna says here that we can perform yajnya by restricting our sensory intake. Now, let's look at the deeper meaning of this shloka. By regulating the intake of our senses, we reduce our dependence on the senses and in doing so, offer them senses back to the universe. In parallel, our life forces also do not need to work hard in order to digest and process all this sensory "food" that we consume. Therefore, we also offer our life force back to the universal or cosmic life force. In other words, we say "Here, please take these senses and life force back. It is your property to begin with. It is not mine."

Bhagavad Gita Verse 31, Chapter 4

*yajnyashishtaamritabhujō yaanti brahma sanaatanam |
naayam lokostyayajnyasya kutonyaha kurusattama || 31 ||*

Only those who taste the nectar of sacrificial remnants obtain the ever-existing eternal essence. The non-performer of sacrifice does not have (joy) in this world, how (will he get joy) in other worlds, O foremost among Kurus?

yajnya-shishtaaha : remnants of sacrifice
amritabhujaha : those who have tasted
nectar
yaanti : obtain
brahma : eternal essence
sanaatanam : ever-existing
na : not
lokaha : in this world
asti : have
ayajnyasya : non-performer of sacrifice
kutaha : how
anyaha : other worlds
kurusattama : O foremost among Kurus

So far, Shri Krishna gave us a wide range of yajnyas that we can implement in our daily lives. In this shloka, he urges us to implement at least one of those yajnyas in our life. He says that one who does not live his life in the yajnya spirit will not even be able to function properly in the material world, let alone progress on the spiritual path.

Let's take a practical example. Suppose we decide to follow the yajnya of nityaahaarah. In other words, we decide to restrict our food intake. How do we actually implement this? Shri Krishna tells us that in all actions that we undertake, we should first perform the yajnya, and then partake of the "remnants" of the yajnya.

So if we see a tasty dish, we perform a yajnya on the spot by saying "I am performing a yajnya. I first offer all the food to Ishvara because this food belongs to Ishvara. I will take only x amount for myself as the remnants of that yajnya." The key point here is we first perform the yajnya, then partake of the fruit of the action. We do not rush directly into the action. This lets our intellect override the impulses of our senses.

If we truly make yajnya spirit a part of our life, we will develop "praasada buddhi", which is one of the cornerstones of karma yoga. Since the praasada is a gift from Ishvaraa, we will not compare it to someone else's prasaada. In doing so, we will subdue negative emotions such as jealousy and insecurity. Over time, we will find inner joy in conducting such yajnyas every day. This inner joy is called "amrita" or nectar in this shloka. It will have the power of negating all our sorrows.

One who does not maintain the attitude of yajnya goes against the laws of nature, as it were. This is because the yajnya spirit pervades the entire universe, as we have seen earlier. Such a person lives an

unhappy existence even in the material world, and has no chance of attaining any spiritual goals whatsoever.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 32, Chapter 4

*evam bahuvidhaa yajnyaa vitato brahmano mukhe |
karmajaan viddhi taan sarvaanevām jnyaatvaa vimokshyase || 32 ||*

In this manner, various types of sacrifices have been explained in the Vedas. Understand that all those are born of action; having known this, (you will) be liberated.

evam : in this manner
bahuvidhaa : various types
yajnyaa : sacrifice
vitataaha : have been explained
brahmanaaha : Vedas
mukhe : mouth
karmajaan : born of action
viddhi : understand
taan : those
sarvaan : all
evam : in this manner
jnyaatvaa : having known this

vimokshyase : (you will) be liberated

With this shloka, Shri Krishna concludes the section on practical yajnyas. In this section, we came across many varieties of yajnya. There are several more types of yajnyas in the scriptures such as pilgrimages, how to perform poojas during certain festivals, chanting of japas and so on. With the guidance of a teacher, we can choose the one that works best for us and follow it diligently.

Having concluded this section, Shri Krishna now makes a very important point. He says that while performing these yajnyas, we should never forget that any yajnya is ultimately an action. We saw earlier that actions are performed by the gunaas of prakriti. And anything that is related to gunaas is distinct from the eternal essence. So, how can yajnyas move us closer to liberation if they are in the realm of gunaas?

Another way of looking at this issue is as follows. Anything that is a result of action will always be finite by definition. We are looking for realization of the eternal essence which is infinite. How will yajnyaas, born out of finite action, make us obtain the infinite eternal essence?

The key point to understand here is that action does not yield realization, only knowledge can do so. Performance of yajnya is a preparatory step towards realization, just like we prepare for sleep in the night. We can lie down on the bed, we can drink a cup of hot milk, we can turn off the light and so on. But the onset of sleep happens on its own. Similarly, even if we perform yajnyaas, realization will happen when we gain the knowledge when we are not the doer or enjoyer of any actions.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 33, Chapter 4

*shreyaandravyamayaadyajnyaanjnyaanayagnaha parantapa |
sarvam karmaakhilam paartha jnyaane parisamaapyate || 33 ||*

Superior to sacrifice of materials is the sacrifice of knowledge, O scorcher of foes. All actions completely culminate in knowledge, O Paartha.

shreyaan : superior
dravyamayaat : material oriented
yajnyaat : sacrifice
jnyaana-yagnaha : knowledge sacrifice
parantapa : O scorcher of foes
sarvam : all
karma : actions
akhilam : completely
paartha : O Paartha
jnyaane : knowledge
parisamaapyate : culminate

Having pointed out the defect of finitude in the wide range of yajnyaas, Shri Krishna praises jnyaana yajnya or the sacrifice of knowledge. Another interpretation, but on similar lines, is that the yajnya of knowledge is the only one that leads us to the path of shreyas or bliss, rather than the path of preyas or the pleasant.

We learned about the sacrifice of knowledge in an earlier shloka. In this yajnya, we go through three steps to acquire the right understanding and knowledge through study of the scriptures: shravana, manana, nidhidhyaasana. Shravana is listening with complete attention. Manana is deep contemplation on the teachings. Nidhidhyaasana is internalizing the teachings through concentration and meditation.

So why is the sacrifice of knowledge better than the other sacrifices? Shri Krishna offers the answer in the second line of the shloka. He says that all actions culminate in knowledge. If we add the context of karmayoga to this sentence, the meaning becomes : all selfishness that motivates actions completely ends in the realization of infinitude. It is like a river that stops flowing when it reaches, or realizes, the ocean.

Let's dig into this a little deeper. What does it mean to end selfishness? It means that the notion of doership and enjoyership ends. No more does one think "I am doing this" and "I have obtained the result". Furthermore, this knowledge is permanent. It is not a finite material object like the result of any other yajnya like material yajnya and so on.

Therefore, when we truly understand this highest knowledge that everything is the eternal essence, we identify with infinite and permanent, thereby ending our sense of finitude. Once that happens, we continue performing all our actions. However, all selfish motives behind those actions will have completely vanished.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 34, Chapter 4

*tadviddhi pranipaadena pariprashnena sevayaa |
upadekshyanti te jnyaanam jnyaaninastattvadarshinaha || 34 ||*

Know that by complete surrender, inquiry and service, you will receive instruction from those who have gained knowledge through direct realization of the eternal essence.

tat : that
viddhi : know
pranipaadena : surrender to the feet
pariprashnena : inquiry
sevayaa : service
upadekshyanti : will instruct
te : they
jnyaanam : knowledge
jnyaaninaha : those who have knowledge
tattvadarshinaha : through direct realization of the eternal essence

In the previous shloka, Shri Krishna spoke about the realization of the eternal essence that is obtained through the sacrifice of knowledge. Here, he describes the method through which we should go about pursuing that knowledge.

Shri Krishna says that we should begin by approaching a teacher who has two key qualities. One, he should be a tattva-darshinaha. He should have realized the eternal essence himself first-hand. Second, he should be a jnyaaninaha, one who knows the technique of communicating this knowledge. Both qualities are essential and complementary. One without the other will not work.

Having approached the teacher, we should first completely surrender ourselves to him and accept him as our teacher. If we don't do so then our ego comes into the mix and disrupts everything. The teachings will have no impact if such a thing occurs. We see this type of behaviour when someone approaches a teacher and ends up using that meeting to boast about one's own knowledge rather than surrender to the teacher.

Next, we should have a thirst for inquiry about the eternal essence, which will be reflected by the questions we ask the teacher. Questions like: Who am I? How do I free myself of bondage? This is what the teacher should be able to answer. All our scriptures including the Upanishads, the Gita and the Bhagavatam are a dialogue between a teacher and student. Furthermore, we should not question about worldly matters like should I get married, should I take this job and so on. Liberation should be top priority.

Finally, we should continue building a relationship with the teacher through serving him. This will foster humility in us. It will also build a better connection and tuning between the teacher and the student. In the Gita, both Arjuna and Dhritaraashtra heard the Gita, but only

Arjuna truly understood it. This is because Arjuna was in tune with Shri Krishna and Dhritaraashtra was not. Also, there is absolutely no room for a transactional or "coaching class" relationship between the teacher and student. Service is the only way.

Even Sant Jnyaaneshwar gained knowledge by serving his guru Nivruttinaath. He says "yogiraja vinavane mana aale vo maaye" which means "I gained realization by serving my guru yogiraja Nivrutti-naatha".

Bhagavad Gita Verse 35, Chapter 4

*yajnyaatvaa na punarmohamevam yaasyasi paandava |
yena bhootaanyasheshena drakshasyaatmanyatho mayi || 35 ||*

Having realized that knowledge, never again will you be subjected to delusion in this manner, O Paandava. By that (knowledge), you will view all beings completely in you, and likewise, in me.

Having explained the method of acquiring knowledge from a teacher, Shri Krishna praises this knowledge in the following shlokas. In this shloka, he provides a test by which we know whether we have truly gained this knowledge or not. He says that this knowledge totally transforms our vision. It gives us whole new way to view the world.

Imagine we are at a social gathering. We are introduced to a new person, someone whom we have never met before. At that point, we try to size up that person and are not quite sure how the conversation will go. But when we find out that both of us went to the same school for 8 years, we instantly connect with that person. The sense of separation between us and that person diminishes just a little.

Now, take this destruction of separation to its logical extreme where we see all things - plants, rocks, animals, humans - as a part of our own self. Everything is connected to each other. Furthermore, we realize that in essence, distinct entities such as plants and animals are not really distinct. There is only one Ishvaraa but appearing as many forms. This is the grand vision after having obtained this knowledge.

So therefore, having gained this knowledge, our moha or delusion with regards to who we are, what is our correct relationship with the world, what are our duties, what is good and bad - all these questions are answered with this vision of the world. After having this vision, our actions in the world continue, but they do not accumulate any further karmaas because we are in tune with the world.

yat : that
jnyaatvaa : having realized
na : not
punar : again
moham : delusion
evam : in this manner
yaasyasi : subjected
paandava : O Paandava
yena : by that
bhootaani : all beings
asheshena : completely
drakshasi : view
aatmani : in you
atho : and likewise
mayi : in me

Bhagavad Gita Verse 36, Chapter 4

*api chedasi paapebhyaha sarvebhyaha paapakrittamaha |
sarvam jnyaanaplavenaiva vrajinam santarishyasi || 36 ||*

api : even
chet : if
asi : you are
paape-bhyaha : sinners
sarve-bhyaha : among all
paapa-krittamaha: most sinful
sarvam : all
jnyaana-plavena : boat of knowledge
eva : definitely
vrajinam : sins
santarishyasi : cross over

Even if you are the most sinful among all sinners, you will certainly cross over all sins with the boat of knowledge.

Shri Krishna continues speaking about the greatness of knowledge in this shloka. He says that this knowledge has the power of destroying all of our sins completely, regardless of how many sins we committed in the past.

Let's re-examine what is meant by sin here using an example. Two most common sins are stealing and harming someone. In both these cases, the physical act itself is not the sin. It is the ego, the assertion of individuality and superiority behind each act, that is the real sin. This sense of separation created by the ego causes us to commit these acts, and experience joy and sorrow as a result. Over the course of our living, we have accumulated a large number of karmas.

Shri Krishna says here that the knowledge gained through sacrifice will destroy all sins. How will this happen? This will happen because the sinner himself will be annihilated through this knowledge. The sinner is nothing but the ego, the notion of individuality created by the false sense of identification with the finite body, mind and intellect.

This annihilation of the ego is comparable to deletion of an email account. An email account is nothing but a persona created in the virtual world. It can receive regular emails as well as spam emails. But when the email account itself is deleted, it will no longer be the recipient of any kind of email, regular or junk.

So therefore, Shri Krishna paints a beautiful picture to deliver this message. He says that we can cross over the river of all our sins with the boat of knowledge.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 37, Chapter 4

*yathaidhaamsi samiddhognirbhasmasaatkuruterjuna |
jnyaanaagnihi sarvakarmaani bhasmasaatkurute tathaa || 37 ||*

Just as a burning flame turns fuel into ashes, O Arjuna, so does the fire of knowledge turn all actions into ashes.

yathaa : just as
edhaamsi : fuel
samiddhaha : burning
agnihi : flame
bhasmasaat : ashes
kurute : turn into
arjuna : O Arjuna
jnyaana-agnihi : fire of knowledge
sarkakarmaani : all actions
bhasmasaat : ashes
kurute : turn into
tathaa : so does

Previously, Shri Krishna mentioned that having gained knowledge, we will be able to cross over all our sins. But does that mean that the sins remain hidden somewhere? In this shloka, he says that all sins or karmaas get destroyed with knowledge. Just as fire has the capability to burn fuel in the form of wood or coal into ashes, so does knowledge totally destroy karmaas.

Karmaas accumulate in our psyche due to ignorance of our true identity. Now, knowledge and ignorance are mutually exclusive. One cannot remain when the other is present. Take an example from early school. Once you what the addition symbol "+" does, you no longer get confused when you see a question on addition.

So when knowledge comes, ignorance is destroyed, as well as karmaas that were created a result of ignorance. And when the sense of doership and enjoyership vanishes, then situations do not cause joy or sorrow. No more karmaas are accumulated.

In this manner, Shri Krishna continues to praise knowledge in this shloka and the following two shlokas.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 38, Chapter 4

*na hi jnyaanena sadrisham pavitramiha vidyate |
tatsvayam yogasamsiddhaha kaalenaatmani vindati || 38 ||*

Certainly, there is nothing in this world as purifying as knowledge. He who is proficient in yoga, himself discovers that knowledge in his own self, in due course.

na : nothing
hi : certainly
jnyaanena : knowledge
sadrisham : like
pavitram : purifying
iha : in this world
vidyate : exists
tat : that knowledge
svayam : himself
yogasamsiddhaha : one proficient in
yoga
kaalena : in due course
aatmani : in oneself
vindati : discover

Shri Krishna again praises knowledge as the most superior means of self realization, as compared to other means. He also says that this knowledge is ultimately discovered by the seeker in himself through his own efforts. The two key points to note here that the seeker finds it (a) by his own efforts, and (b) in himself.

Many seekers run to teacher after teacher in hopes of self realization. They "try" a teacher for a while, then go to another one if it doesn't work out. Shri Krishna reminds us that ultimately, it is our own effort, focus and motivation that will help us get the knowledge. The teacher is no doubt needed to guide us in the right direction. But the effort to purify ourselves through various yanjaas is ours to put in, no one else can do the hard work for us. Once we develop the right qualities of a sincere seeker and become proficient in whatever spiritual practice that we follow, knowledge will come automatically.

Furthermore, this knowledge is not something that is outside of us. Academic and spiritual literature certainly helps, but true knowledge always comes from within. Shri Krishna also gently warns us that this knowledge will not come instantly, nor will it take thousands of years. It will come when we are ready.

Who is fit for attaining this knowledge? The next shloka explains.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 39, Chapter 4

*shraddhavaanllabhate jnyaanam tatparaha samyatendriyaha |
jnyaanam labdhvaa paraan shaantimachirenaadhigacchati || 39 ||*

One who has faith, who is completely focused on attaining knowledge and has restrained the senses, obtains this knowledge. Having obtained this knowledge, he instantly attains ultimate peace.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna describes the attributes we need to cultivate in order to attain knowledge of self-realization. He point out three attributes : faith, focus, and sense control.

The most important qualification that we should have is shraddha, or faith. But what specifically should we have faith in? It is four things: faith in scriptures, in our teacher, in ourselves and in the truth of the eternal essence. Furthermore, this faith has to come out of utter conviction that the material world is not the be-all and end-all. There is an changeless eternal reality behind this ever-changing material world. Unless we are convinced that there is something beyond the material world, we will never develop true faith.

However, we have to be careful not to get stuck at level of faith. If our faith becomes too rigid and is guided by dogma rather than intellectual questioning, it will morph into superstition and fanaticism. Just like we learn to appreciate a technical subject such as algebra through inquiry and verification, so too should our faith use the same means to strengthen itself.

In addition to faith, Shri Krishna mentions two more attributes. First is tatparah, which is the keen intent and focus of the seeker to do what it takes to pursue the path chosen. Second is samyatindriyah, which is restraint and control over the senses. If sense restraint is absent, then our attention would quickly stray away from the spiritual path into the material world.

Now, if we develop these qualities and follow the path of knowledge, then we will know that we have gained knowledge through attainment of everlasting peace. As long as the ego is present, it generates noise or chatter in the form of selfish thoughts. It is like the background noise generated by our fridge that we have gotten used to. Knowledge of self-realization annihilates the ego, which eliminates the ego's

shraddhavaan : one with faith
labhate : obtains
jnyaanam : knowledge
tatparaha : one who has complete focus
on attaining knowledge
samyatendriyaha : one who has re-
strained the senses
jnyaanam : knowledge
labdhvaa : having obtained
paraan : ultimate
shaantim : peace
achirena : instantly
adhigacchati : attain

noise, giving us everlasting peace. Ultimately, we are all seeking peace, which is beyond happiness.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 40, Chapter 4

*ajnyashchaashraddadhaanashcha samshayaatmaa vinashyati |
naayam lokosti na paro na sukham sanshayaatmanaha || 40 ||*

One who is ignorant, devoid of faith and who doubts constantly is destroyed. Neither in this world, nor in other worlds is peace attained by one who constantly doubts.

Having pointed out the qualifications needed in a seeker to gain knowledge of self-realization, Shri Krishna explains the obstacles, or "dis-qualifications", that prevent us from accessing that knowledge. There are three main obstacles: ignorance, lack of faith, and constant doubting.

Fortunate are those who have had the chance to even come across something called spiritual knowledge, scriptures, Gita and so on. But unless one comes across a taste of the scriptures, one spends their entire life totally ignorant of the eternal reality behind the changing world. So it is this ignorance that becomes the obstacle towards the knowledge of self-realization.

Secondly, Shri Krishna says that one who lacks faith will never fully gain this knowledge. As mentioned earlier, we have to possess faith in scriptures, in our teacher, in ourselves and in the truth of the eternal essence until we gain the knowledge of self-realization. Without faith, we will not last in the long and arduous journey.

Finally, the person who doubts everything will also find it difficult to gain knowledge. Now, to be sure, skepticism and inquiry is absolutely important. In fact, it is encouraged by spiritual teachers. But constant doubting without taking efforts to resolve those doubts will become a huge roadblock in gaining spiritual knowledge.

Shri Krishna also says that constant doubting is not just an obstacle on the spiritual path. It also prevents us from living peacefully in the material world. Each time we board a train or a plane, we implicitly have faith that the driver will take us to our destination safely. If we constantly doubt the capability of the driver, we will never be able to go about our daily business.

ajnyaha : ignorant
cha : and
ashradhaanaha : devoid of faith
cha : and
samshayaatmaa : one who constantly doubts
vinashyati : destroyed
na : not
ayam : this
lokaha : world
asti : is
na : neither
na : no
sukham : happiness
sanshayaatmanaha : one who constantly doubts

Bhagavad Gita Verse 41, Chapter 4

*yogasannyastakarmaanam jnyaanasanchinnasanshayam |
aatmavantam na karmaani nibhandanti dhananjaya || 41 ||*

One who has renounced actions through yoga, one who has severed all doubts through knowledge, such a self-poised person is not bound by actions, O conqueror of wealth.

yoga : yoga
sannyasta: one who has renounced
karmaanam : actions
jnyaana : knowledge
sanchinna : severed
sanshayam : all doubts
aatmavantam : self-poised
na : do not
karmaani : actions
nibhandanti : bind
dhananjaya : O conqueror of wealth

Shri Krishna now begins to conclude the fourth chapter with this shloka. He re-emphasizes that one who follows the path of karma-sanyaasa, or renunciation of action, is liberated from all bondage. He refers to Arjuna as Dhananjaya, which means conqueror of wealth, because Arjuna had accumulated massive wealth from conquests of kingdoms. Also, he had gained wealth in the form of knowledge from Shri Krishna.

One who has attained the knowledge of self-realization acts without a sense of doership and enjoyership of action. It is important to note that renunciation of action refers to renunciation of doership and enjoyership, not renunciation of the action itself. Actions continue to happen. Furthermore, this yoga or prescribed methodology needs to be learned from a teacher, it is difficult to learn on one's own.

Shri Krishna also reiterates the knowledge of self realization dispels all doubts in the seeker's mind. Till this knowledge is attained, doubts such as who is the doer of action, who is the enjoyer of results, what is the relation of the self to action will remain. One who has gained this knowledge and dispelled all such doubts is called "aatmavant" or one who has gained knowledge of our own self.

A classic example here is that the space in a pot thinks that it is the pot. Once it knows that it is space, it immediately realizes that it is not subject to modifications like big or small, brown or white, moving or stationary and so on. From that point on, any change to the pot will not affect the space in the pot. Similarly, once our doubts vanish, our actions will not bind us.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 42, Chapter 4

*tasmaadajnyaanasambhootam hritstham jnyaanaasinaatmanaha |
chhittavainam sanshayam yogamaatishthottishtha bhaarata || 42 ||*

Therefore, with the sword of knowledge, tear your doubts that are born of ignorance and reside in your heart; establish yourself in this path of yoga, and arise, O Arjuna.

tasmaat : therefore
ajnyaana : ignorance
sambhootam : born of
hritstham : reside in the heart
jnyaana : knowledge
asina : sword of
aatmanaha : your
chhittavaa : tear
enam : this
sanshayam : doubts
yogam : yoga
uttishtha : arise
bhaarata : O Bhaarata

In this concluding verse of the fourth chapter, Shri Krishna urges Arjuna to cast away all his doubts and get back to fighting the Kurukshetra war. In other words, he asks the students of the Gita to put the teaching of the fourth chapter into practice, and to act in this world.

Shri Krishna reiterates the location of our accumulated ignorance. He uses the word "hritstham" which literally means heart, but actually refers to the four-fold antaha-karana comprising the mind, intellect, memory and ego.

This shloka also provides a concise summary of the fourth chapter. Ignorance in the form of individuality, selfishness and finitude, is our natural condition. This ignorance causes us to question our relationship with the world, just like Arjuna got confused in regards to his duty as a warrior. Having gained knowledge, in the form of universality, selflessness and infinitude, we know exactly how to transact with the world. All our doubts are destroyed. We begin to act in a spirit of yajnya, where we see the same eternal essence in the actor, the action and the result. Ultimately, like the shloka says, we arise not just physically, but also spiritually, into a new level of consciousness.

<i>om tatsatiti shrimadbhagavadgitasu upanishadsu brahmavidyayaam
yogashastre shrikrishnaarjunasamvade</i>

<i>jnyaanakarmasanyaasayogonaamo chaturthodhyaahaha || 4 ||</i>

Summary of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 4

The journey from the first chapter to the fourth chapter is one of higher and higher levels of integrating or tuning our personality. In the first chapter, we are at the level of selfish action, where we see gain and loss in everything we do. As we move into the second and third chapters, we are introduced to the notion of "nishkaam karma" or desire-less action. Here, we slowly give up attachment to the result of our action by dedicating it to a higher ideal.

In this chapter titled "Jnyaana Karma Sanyaasa Yoga", we move one level higher from desire-less action to agency-less action. What does agency-less action mean? As the key shloka in this chapter indicates, it is the ability to see inaction in action and action in inaction. When we are operating at the level of a karmayogi, we express our desires through performing actions, but we diminish our sense of "mine-ness" or enjoyership by dedicating all the results to Ishvara.

But as we progress on this path, we begin to realize that all actions happen through Maaya, also known as prakriti or nature. Even actions like the surgeon conducting surgery happen through Maaya, upon closer inspection. We realize that the I, the eternal essence, is just the witness. The I does not do anything. This is agency-less action. Our sense of doership or "I-ness" begins to diminish as well.

Ultimately everything is yajnya in brahman. This is a very deep and subtle means of looking at the world. To help us practice developing this vision, Shri Krishna gives us simpler yajnyas such as restraining our senses, worship of a deity and so on. But the end goal is jnaana yagnya or the sacrifice of knowledge. The next chapter goes into more detail about the characteristics that we have to develop in order to be able to realize this very subtle and deep vision.

This chapter also gives us a glimpse of Ishvara, the cosmic power and intelligence that controls this universe. Although beyond birth and imperishable, that power manifests itself whenever there is an extreme disharmony in the universe, restores harmony and becomes unmanifest again.



Karma Sanyaasa Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 5**Arjuna uvaacha:**sannyaasam karmanaam krishna punaryogam cha shansasi |
yachchshreya etayorekam tanme broohi sunishchitam || 1 ||*

sannyaasam : renunciation
karmanaam : action
krishna : O Krishna
punah : then
yogam : yoga
cha : and
shansasi : praise
yat : that
shreya : which is beneficial
etayoha : of the two
ekam : one
tat : which
me : for me
broohi : tell
sunishchitam : most assuredly

First you speak about yoga, then you praise renunciation of action, O Krishna. Of the two, tell me which one, most assuredly, is beneficial for me.

As he was concluding the previous chapter, Shri Krishna spoke about the renunciation of action through yoga in the second-last shloka. He was quite clear that renunciation of action does not mean running away from action. It means renouncing the agency, or the sense of doership behind the action.

Now, Arjuna still retained a desire to run away from the war against his relatives. So even though Shri Krishna was quite clear that one cannot run away from action, Arjuna was still looking for a way to quit fighting the war. So he interpreted the word "renunciation" to mean what most people think renunciation means: going away to a remote ashram, becoming a monk, and then contemplating upon the eternal essence, casting aside any other worldly responsibilities.

With this interpretation in mind, he wanted to know whether renunciation of action was better than karmayoga. If that were the case, he could run away from the war to a place of contemplation, and gain self-realization following that path. He wanted an unambiguous answer from Shri Krishna because he had already asked this question at the beginning of the third chapter.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 5**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**sannyaasah karmayogashcha nihshreyasakaraavubhau |
tayostu karmasannyaasaatkarmayogo vishishyate || 2 ||*

sannyaasaha : renunciation of action
 karmayogashcha : yoga of action
 nihshreyasakaraau : confer ultimate bliss
 ubhau : both
 tayoh : between those two
 tu : but
 karmasannyaasaat : than renunciation
 of action
 karmayogaha : yoga of action
 vishishyate : superior

Shree Bhagavaan said: Both renunciation of action and the yoga of action confer ultimate bliss. But, between the two, the yoga of action is superior than renunciation of action.

Advice, given by a teacher to a student, takes into account the student's stage in his learning progression. Shri Krishna, the teacher, replies to Arjuna's question by saying that for someone with Arjuna's proclivity, karma yoga or the yoga of action is a better path than karma sanyaasa or the renunciation of action.

By making this statement, Shri Krishna reiterates the teaching imparted to Arjuna in the beginning of the third chapter, when Arjuna had asked a similar question. Shri Krishna throughout the Gita has stressed that we can attain self-realization while staying in the world and performing our duties. Like Arjuna, we often get tempted to renounce the world, especially when we are going through a tough time in our life. But as we have seen earlier, if we retreat from the world but have not fully addressed our ego and our selfish desires, we will still be thinking about the material world in the confines of the cave or the ashram we have retreated into.

Therefore, having taken into account Arjuna's mental make-up, knowing fully well that like us, Arjuna still had a lot of desires, Shri Krishna deemed that karma yoga was the right path for Arjuna, and that he was not well-suited to becoming a monk.

Now, does the follower of karma yoga attain the same result that the follower of renunciation attains? He addressed this point in the upcoming shlokas.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 5

*jneyah sa nityasannyasee yo na dveshti na kaanshati |
nirdvandvo hi mahaabaaho sukham bandhaatpramuchyate || 3 ||*

He who does not hate anything, nor expects anything, know him to be an eternal renouncer. For one who is free from duality, O mighty-armed, he happily casts off bondage.

During the time of the Mahabhaarata war, and even now, there existed a fixed ideal of what it means to become a renouncer, which was that one runs away from the world to some remote place. Shri Krishna needed to change that ideal completely. So he defines what it means to be a renouncer or sannyasi in this shloka. A renouncer is one who completely gives up his ego, not external objects and situations.

In that regard, Shri Krishna says that if we have three qualities: freedom from hatred, expectation and duality, that person is a true renouncer. Firstly, if something is obstacle to happiness, or someone is giving us sorrow, we generate hatred for that person or object. Secondly, if we always keep thinking that we will become happy in the future, we generate expectations, taking consciousness away from the present and into the future. Finally, if we only get attracted to certain aspects of our existence, the other aspects will torture us and bind us. This is what is meant by duality.

So therefore, one who has become free from these 3 qualities has truly renounced the material world, even if he continues to perform his duties. This is a high standard indeed. Having clarified the definition of snanyaasi, Shri Krishna compares a sannyasi to a karmayogi in the next shloka.

jneyah : know
saha : that
nitya : eternal
sannyasee : renouncer
yaha : he who
na : does not
dveshti : hate anything
na : does not
kaanshati : expect anything
nirdvandva : free from duality
hi : for
mahaabaaho : O mighty-armed
sukham : happily
bandhaat : bondage
pramuchyate : casts off

Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 5

*saankhyayogau prithagbaalaaha pravadanti na panditaahaa |
ekamapyasthitaha samyagubhayorvindate phalam || 4 ||*

saankhya : yoga of knowledge
yogau : yoga of action
prithak : different
baalaaha : children
pravadanti : say
na : not
panditaahaa : wise people
ekam : one
api : also
asthitaha : established
samyak : perfectly
ubhayoha : both
vindate : obtain
phalam : result

Only children say that the yoga of knowledge and the yoga of action are different, wise people do not. One who is perfectly established in one, obtains the result of both.

Shri Krishna reiterates his message from third chapter in this shloka. He says that the path to attain self-realization is one, but it has two stages. In the first stage, the seeker performs actions per his svadharma, but focuses on checking and sublimating the ego while performing his actions. This stage is called karma yoga. When the seeker has exhausted the majority of his desires, he becomes ready for the next stage.

In the second stage, the seeker minimizes actions other than those performed for gaining knowledge through the guidance of a teacher. The second stage is possible only after the ego has been sublimated through renunciation. This stage is called karma sanyasa.

Shri Krishna then goes on to say that only people who are ignorant of the connection between these two stages say that karma-sanyasa and karmayoga are different paths. They also think that it is possible to bypass stage one and go straight to stage two. This ability to bypass stage one is only possible for a handful of advanced seekers in this world, seekers who have already sublimated their desires.

Therefore, having known this, he urges us to become wise people and to not think of the path to self-realization as two different paths. If we become established in one stage, we will automatically get the result of self-realization that one gets from pursuing the other stage. In other words, we should follow the one path that we are qualified for, and follow it properly.

How should a wise person look at these two stages? We will see in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 5

*yatsaankhyaih praapyate sthaanam tadyogairapi gamyate |
ekam saankhyam cha yogam cha yah pashyati sah pashyati || 5 ||*

One who obtains the state of bliss through knowledge, also reaches that same state through yoga. He who sees knowledge and yoga as one, that person sees (correctly).

In this shloka, the words yoga and knowledge need further elaboration to get at the underlying meaning. In the context of this chapter, they mean yoga of action (karmayoga) and yoga of knowledge through renunciation (karma sannyasa yoga) respectively. Having added this context, the shloka now reads as follows: one who obtains the state of bliss through the yoga of knowledge, also reaches that same state through the yoga of action. In the wise person's view, both of these are one. It is like two passengers boarding a train from different stations. Both reach the same destination.

Let us dig deeper to understand what is common between renunciation and action. Imagine that two people are striving for self-realization. One person performs karma yoga, but does not think carefully about how he performs his actions. Without proper thought and discrimination, his actions become selfish and his vaasanaas increase. Ultimately, he does not attain his goal.

The other person decides that he prefers renunciation. He goes to an ashram to lead the life of a monk. But even though he has renounced the material world, he keeps thinking about his life in the material world. He too, does not attain his goal, because his desires prevent him from properly absorbing his teacher's teachings.

In both cases, renunciation and action do not work because they are missing the key ingredient - knowledge. Unless one uses discrimination while performing action, or maintains the knowledge that I am not the doer prior to renunciation, the goal is not attained by either person. Therefore, Shri Krishna urges wise people to keep discrimination in the picture while considering either stage of the path.

Having reassured Arjuna that both stages yield the same outcome, Shri Krishna next addresses why karma yoga is more appropriate for Arjuna.

yat : one who
saankhyaih : through knowledge
praapyate : obtains
sthaanam : state of bliss
tat : that
yogaih : through yoga
api : also
gamyate : reaches
ekam : as one
saankhyam : knowledge
cha : and
yogam : yoga
cha : also
yah : the person who
pashyati : sees
sah : that person
pashyati : sees

Bhagavad Gita Verse 6, Chapter 5

*sannyasaastu mahaabaaho duhkhamaptumayogataha |
yogayukto munirbrahma nachirenaadhigachhati || 6 ||*

For renunciation, O mighty-armed, is difficult to attain without yoga. The contemplative person established in yoga swiftly attains the eternal essence.

sannyasaaha : renunciation
tu : for
mahaabaaho : O mighty-armed
duhkham : difficult
aptum : to obtain
ayogataha : without yoga
yogayuktaha : established in yoga
munih : contemplative person
brahma : eternal essence
nachirena : swiftly
adhigachhati : attains

In this shloka, Shri Krishna says that for a seeker that has not fully exhausted his desires, bypassing the first stage of karmayoga will make attainment of the eternal essence difficult. The best option is to start with karmayoga, because like the yoga of knowledge, it too will yield the same result of self-realization.

To understand this, let us examine a different question: Why are there so few PhDs in the world? It takes a certain kind of person to obtain a PhD. One has to be ready to spend most of their life in a lab. One has to do what it takes to get their experiment right. They have to survive on their petty stipend for several years. And all this is for the sole objective of discovering something that benefits mankind.

Similarly, not many people can minimize their worldly activities so much that they retire to an ashram to gain knowledge from a teacher. For most of us, the pull of our desires is so strong that we will continue to work in this world. Therefore, liberation has to come from our actions, not through renunciation.

Furthermore, Shri Krishna also mentions a caveat about action. One should not perform actions just like that. Karmayoga advocates thoughtful action, where one thinks before one acts. The biggest obstacle in moving forward spiritually is our ego. It creates selfish desires that move us towards the material world. So when we performs actions thoughtfully, in other words, when we ensure that our actions are performed without attachment towards the result, our selfish desires automatically get slowly eliminated.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 5

*yogayukto vishuddhaatmaa vijitaatmaa jitendriyaha |
sarvabhootaatmabhootaatmaa kurvaannapi na lipyate || 7 ||*

One who is established in yoga, who has conquered the mind, body and senses, one who sees his own self in all beings, even while acting is not tainted.

yogayuktaha : established in yoga
vishuddhaatmaa : one with pure mind
vijitaatmaa : one who has conquered the body
jitendriyaha : one who has control over senses
sarvabhootaatmabhootaatmaa : one who sees his own self in all beings
kurvan : while acting
na : does not
api : even while
lipyate : tainted

Imagine that a new factory has opened up in a small town, and the public has been invited to take tours of the factory. In one such tour, we have a businessman, an environmentalist, an engineer and a musician. As he is walking through the factory, the businessman's first thought is about the amount of profit that this factory generates. The environmentalist thinks about the pollution caused by the factory. The engineer marvels at the brand new machines. And the musician loves the rhythm generated by the clanking machines. One's vision gives an indication of how one's mind works.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna illustrates the vision of one who is acting with the spirit of karma yoga. Even while acting, that person does not generate any further desires, because he has the same vision that a renouncer has. He sees the eternal essence everywhere, in himself as well as in everyone else. And like the example we saw earlier, his vision indicates that his entire personality, including his mind and intellect, have gained the knowledge of the eternal essence.

Furthermore, Shri Krishna reminds us that such knowledge is not possible without first bringing the body, mind and senses under control. Actions performed by such an individual do not "taint" him. Only when the sense of doership and enjoyership is present can actions can taint someone, in other words, cause further desires to sprout. When the ego behind actions has gone away, then those actions do not generate further desires.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8-9, Chapter 5

naiva kinchitkaromeeti yukto manyeta tattvavit |
pashyan-shrunvan-sparshan-jighran-ashnan-gachchan-svapan-shvasan || 8
||
pralapan-visrijan-grihnan-unmishan-nimishan-api |
indriyaaneendriyartheshu vartanta iti dhaarayan || 9 ||

na : not
 eva : ever
 kinchit : anything
 karomi : I act
 iti : in this manner
 yuktaha : one established in yoga
 manyeta : asserts
 tattvavit : who has realized the eternal essence
 pashyan : seeing
 shrunvan : hearing
 sparshan : touching
 jighran : smelling
 ashnan : eating
 gachchan : moving
 svapan : dreaming
 shvasan : breathing
 pralapan : speaking
 visrijan : discarding
 grihnan : grasping
 unmishan : opening eyelids
 nimishan : closing eyelids
 api : even during
 indriyaani : senses
 indriyartheshu : sense objects
 vartanta : interacting
 iti : this
 dhaarayan : understanding

Never do I perform any action - in this manner asserts the one established in yoga, who has realized the eternal essence. Seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, moving, dreaming and breathing; speaking, discarding, grasping, opening and closing of the eyelids. All this is the senses interacting with the sense objects - this is his understanding.

In prior shlokas, we learned that one who has realized the eternal essence understands that he is not the enjoyer and doer. So to make this as explicit as possible, Shri Krishna provided a detailed illustration of that teaching in this shloka. Here, he gives a comprehensive list of all activities performed by the body, mind and intellect. By providing this illustration, Shri Krishna demonstrates that one who has realized the eternal essence knows, in fact asserts, that he is not doing anything, and all these activities are happening automatically through the body, mind and intellect.

Having looked at this list of activities, we say - yes we understand that blinking, hearing, dreaming and so on is automatic. But what about the process of thinking? Shri Krishna says that even the process of thought also happens automatically. Till such time as the ego is sublimated, it drives our mind to generate selfish thoughts. As the ego gets sublimated through karma yoga, selfish thoughts slowly transition to selfless ones. But the self, or the "I", is just the witness of all these actions for one who has realized the eternal essence. Till then, the "I" thinks that it is the doer.

Only one who has realized the vision of the eternal essence truly knows that he is not the doer. What then, should be the vision of the karmayogi who wants to ultimately have this vision? This topic is tackled in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 5

*brahmanyadhaaya karmaani sangam tvyaktvaa karoti yaha |
lipyate na sa paapena padmapatramivaambhasaa || 10 ||*

Having offered all actions to the eternal essence, and having cast off attachments, he who performs actions does not get tainted by sins, just like water does not taint a lotus leaf.

Previously, we came across the vision of one who has realized the self. He knows that he is not the doer of all his actions. But what about the one who has not realized the self, and who is still working to sublimate his selfish desires? What is his vision?

In this shloka, Shri Krishna says that the person who has not realized the self (that includes most of us) offers all actions in a spirit of devotion to Ishvara. Shri Krishna reiterates that if one has selfish desires, karma yoga is the ideal path to follow. The karma yogi works for a higher ideal such as Ishvara, but one who does not follow karma yoga works for the ego.

Shri Krishna brings Arjuna back to karma yoga with this shloka. Arjuna harbours desires, therefore Shri Krishna does not want him to jump straight into the yoga of renunciation, which is a totally different level.

Now, let's go a little deeper into the topic of attachment. Attachment can happen at four levels : attachment to the result of an action (I want a reward for singing this song), attachment to the action (I will sing a song only in my way), attachment to the sense of doership (I am singing this song) and attachment to the sense of non-doership (By not singing the song, I am the non-singer of this song). The first three are relatively easier to comprehend. The fourth one arises when one has not properly understood the notion of akarma or inaction from the fourth chapter.

So therefore, the karma yogi strives to transcend all four levels of attachment by offering results, actions, doership and non-doership to Ishvara. When he acts in the material world with such a vision, he does not accumulate any further desires, just like a lotus leaf does not get wet even though growing in water.

brahmani : eternal essence
aadhaaya : offered
karmaani : all actions
sangam : attachment
tvyaktvaa : cast off
karoti : perform action
yaha : one who
lipyate : taint
na : do not
saha : him
paapena : sins
padma-patram : lotus leaf
iva : like
ambhasaa : water

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 5

*kaayena manasaa buddhyaa kevalairindriyaih |
yoginaha karma kurvanti sangam tyakvaatmashuddhaye || 11 ||*

kaayena : with body
manasaa : mind
buddhyaa : intellect
indriyaihi : senses
api : only
yoginaha : seeker
karma : actions
kurvanti : perform
sangam : attachment
tyakvaa : cast off
atmashuddhaye : purification of self

Solely with body, mind, intellect and senses does the seeker perform actions, casting off all attachment, for the purification of the self.

In the previous shloka, Shri Krishna explained how a karma yogi offers his actions to Ishvara. But how exactly does he do that? Shri Krishna in this shloka says that the karma yogi continuously keeps the thought that the body, mind, intellect and senses - all these are the property of Ishvara, given by Ishvara. Therefore, all the work done is for the benefit for Ishvara, and not for the ego.

The Gita teaches that the body, mind, intellect and senses are not really "ours". But due to our conditioning, we come to think that they are ours. We then begin to do things for their benefit. For example, the tongue likes sweet food, so we undertake actions to satisfy it by eating things that may not be healthy from a long term perspective. When actions are done for the satisfaction of body, mind, intellect and senses, the sense of "mine-ness" develops and the ego gets strengthened. We then begin to serve the ego.

In this regard, let us recall example of the CFO we had encountered a while ago. As long as the CFO thinks that she is working for company, things will go smoothly. But if she begins to think that working for herself, starts misusing the company's funds as her own funds, she gets into trouble. Similarly, a karma yogi treats his body, mind, intellect and senses as instruments of Ishvara. When that attitude comes, all actions and their results also get offered to Ishvara. In this manner, the seeker detaches himself from the body, mind, intellect and senses from the ego, and attaches them to Ishvara. This is what is meant by "casting off all attachment".

Now, let's examine the second part of shloka where Shri Krishna talks about purification of self. What happens when karma yogi continues to dedicate actions to Ishvara? His mind gets cleared of all selfish desire, and his ego begins to lose its power. The end result is that the mind is purified of all vaasanaas - which is what is meant by "self" in the shloka. Purification of mind brings the karmayogi closer to self-

realization.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 5

*yuktaha karmaphalam tyaktvaa shaantimaapnoti naishtikeem |
ayuktaha kaamakaarena phale sakto nibadhyate || 12 ||*

One who is established in yoga, who has given up the result of action, attains everlasting peace. One who is not established in yoga, who has attachment to results due to desire, gets bound.

yuktaha : one established in yoga
karmaphalam : result of action
tyaktvaa : who has given up
shaantim : peace
aapnoti : attains
naishtikeem : everlasting
ayuktaha : one who is not established in yoga
kaamakaarena : due to desires
phale : results
saktaha : attachment
nibadhyate : gets bound

In this shloka, Shri Krishna compares and contrasts a karma yogi and a materialistic person. While both perform the very same action, and could very well get the same result, their attitude towards the work is different. One who follows karma yoga maintains the attitude that "I am not attached to the results", whereas the materialistic person does not maintain this attitude.

The ignorant person does action for sake of the result. He does not find joy in work itself. If the result is favourable, he gets extremely elated. But this happiness, and in some instances, peace of mind, is temporary. The minute a result of actions becomes favourable, he gets extremely dejected and disappointed. But the karma yogi does not wait for the result of the action to give joy. He finds joy in the work. The peace that he attains is driven from within, rather than from without.

It is this mental attitude that differentiates the karma yogi from the materialistic person. The easiest way to gauge our progress towards karma yoga is to constantly monitor our state of mind. If we get agitated for long periods of time when we receive the result of our action, it is an indication that we have generated an attachment to the result, which in turn indicates that the ego is strong.

The words used to describe both types of seekers bear closer scrutiny. "Yuktaha" literally means yoked or established. In this context, yuktaha means one whose mind is yoked to the intellect. In other words, the mind is under the guidance of the intellect. In contrast, "ayuktaha" is one whose mind is not yoked to the intellect. It follows the direction of the mind and the senses. This difference in the orientation of the mind determines the fate of the seeker.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 5

*sarvakarmaani manasaa sannyasyaaste sukham vashee |
navadvare pure dehee naiva kurvan na kaarayan || 13 ||*

Having mindfully renounced all actions, the conqueror remains established in bliss. The embodied one, in the city with nine gates, neither acts nor causes to act.

Having spoken about the karmayogi's vision, Shri Krishna now provides an illustration of the enlightened seeker's vision in these shlokas. The picture he paints here is that one who identifies himself with the eternal essence, knows that he is only a dweller in the body, just like the resident of a city knows that he is a dweller, who is totally distinct from the city.

Imagine that you move into a new city for a job. As part of the move, you begin to utilize the city's services such as water, electricity, garbage collection, telephone, cable etc. But while you utilize these services, you know that you are a resident of the city. You don't begin to think that you are directly responsible for running the city. For example, when you someone picks up the garbage, it is part of the city's services. You are in no way "running" the services.

Similarly, the enlightened seeker knows that he is the eternal essence, which is a dweller in the body and separate from the body. The body is pictorially depicted as a city with nine gates, each gate being an orifice (ear, nostril, eye) and so on. So when the seeker uses his hands, for example, he knows that the body, mind and intellect are operating independently. The enlightened seeker is in actuality, doing nothing at all. Just like the resident knows that the city's services operate by themselves, and he is just a witness, similarly the enlightened person knows that the self is just a resident in the body, totally separate from the body.

Another indication of the seeker's state is that he has complete control of his senses, and that he has mentally renounced the notion of doership. He knows that it is the body, mind and intellect that is performing action. This is indicated in the first part of the shloka. The end result is that the seeker, knowing that he is separate and distinct from the actions of the body, mind and intellect, lives in complete bliss.

sarvakarmaani : all actions
manasaa : mindfully
sannyasya : having renounced
aste : remains established
sukham : bliss
navadvare : with nine gates
pure : city
dehee : the embodied one
na : not
: ever
kurvan : acts
na : nor
kaarayan : causes to act

Notes

1. Adi Shankaraachaarya in his commentary of this shloka gives an indicator that differentiates an enlightened seeker from an ordinary seeker. Let's say we ask someone the question: "where are you sitting?". If the person answers "on a chair" etc, then he is an ignorant seeker. If he answers "I am always sitting in the body", he is an enlightened seeker.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 5

na kartritvam na karmaani lokasya srijati prabhuh |
na karmaphalasaiyogam svabhaavastu pravartate || 14 ||

Neither agency nor actions, in this world, are created by the eternal essence, and neither does it connect actions to results; for nature organizes (all this).

na : not
 na : not
 karmaani : actions
 lokasya : in this world
 srijati : create
 prabhuh : eternal essence
 na : not
 karmaphala : results and actions
 sai-yogam : connect
 svabhaavaha : nature
 tu : for

pravartate : organizes (all this)

Earlier, Shri Krishna provided the example of the dweller in the city to illustrate the distinction between the eternal essence and the body, mind and intellect. In this shloka, he takes us one step further by saying that the eternal essence is beyond the realm of action. Furthermore, since action implies doership, results and their enjoyership, action and everything that comes with it is in the realm of prakriti or nature. The eternal essence is separate and distinct from action.

Any self-contained system has inherent rules which govern its operations. For example, let us consider the Pac-Man video game. The game is played in a computer that has four buttons which are used to move Pac-Man up, down, left or right. The rules of the game are programmed into the system. If the player manages to get the fruit while evading the monsters, he wins the game. All this happens automatically. It does not require external intervention by any divine or human entity.

But if we take a step back, the Pac-Man character does not really "move" anywhere. It is an illusion created by the computer by projecting the Pac-Man image to different parts of the screen. One who is watching the game very objectively knows that there is no movement of left, right etc.

Similarly, one who sees the world from the absolute standpoint of the eternal essence knows that in reality, there is no action. Action only exists from the standpoint of nature or prakriti. And if action only exists in nature, so does doership, enjoyership, and connection of actions to their results. It is a self-governing automatic system.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 5

*naadatte kasyachitpaapam na sukritam vibhoochu |
ajnyaanenaavritam jnyaanam tena muhyanti jantavaha || 15 ||*

na : not
aadatte : accept
paapam : sins
na : not
sukritam : merits
vibhoochu : eternal essence
ajnyaanena : ignorance
aavritam : veiled
jnyaanam : knowledge
tena : that
muhyanti : deluded
jantavaha : creatures

Neither does the eternal essence accept anyone's sins, nor anyone's merits. Ignorance veils knowledge, that is how creatures are deluded.

In the sequence of shlokas describing the vision of the enlightened seeker, Shri Krishna provided the illustration of the city dweller and also asserted that the eternal essence is separate and distinct from action and its adjuncts including doership, results and enjoyership of result.

In this shloka, he takes us another step further in explaining the distinctness of eternal essence from action. He says that even sin and merit also have nothing to do with eternal essence. He also further says that action, result, doership, enjoyership, sin, merit - the notion that these belong to the "I", the eternal essence, is termed as ignorance. This ignorance is caused due to our strong identification with the body, mind and intellect.

Let us refer to the Pac-Man example from the previous post. Based on his actions in the video game, the Pac-Man character can gain points (merits) or lose points (demerits). This gaining and losing of points is again based on rules of the video game. It, too, is a fully automatic system that does not require any external intervention to work.

Now, in some places in the Gita, Shri Krishna asks us to offer merit and sin to God. But here it is said that eternal essence does not take sin or merit. So how do we reconcile this seeming contradiction? The key thing to understand here is that the person who thinks he is associated with action, sin and merit is at one level, and the person who has identified himself with eternal essence is at another level. It is just like saying that the points accumulated in a Pac-Man game have no bearing in the real world. The game and the real world are two different realms.

Another way to look at it is as follows. Sin and merit are duality. They are two sides of the same coin, as it were, just like black/white, heat/cold and day/night. When you rise above it, duality has no bear-

ing. Day and night do not mean anything when one is in outer space, when one leaves the earth and rises above it.

Here's another noteworthy point. Shri Krishna has used an interesting word to refer to ignorant people in this shloka. He calls them creatures. It is a subtle hint that as long as we operate with body identification, we are similar to animals who also operate only at that level.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 5

*jnyaanena tu tadajnyaanam yeshaam naashitamaatmanaha |
teshaamaadityavatjnyaanam prakashayati tatparam || 16 ||*

For those who have destroyed ignorance through knowledge, such knowledge illumines the eternal essence, just like the sun.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna compares the dispelling of ignorance to the dispelling of darkness by the sun. The light of the sun does not create anything new. It just shows us what was already there, but was hidden by darkness. Similarly, the knowledge of the eternal essence does not create anything new in us. It just reveals our true nature.

Why does Shri Krishna emphasize knowledge so much? The central theme of the Gita is the removal of delusion. The root cause of delusion is ignorance, which is nothing but our identification to the body, mind and intellect. All our efforts should be towards uprooting this ignorance through the correct knowledge. However, our lives are spent in trying to solve problems at the worldly level.

There is always one aspect of our lives that is incomplete or imperfect. For some of us, it could be our job. For others, it could be our family and friends. For some others, it could be our health. Given these various imperfections, we try to better our situation by changing our job, friends and so on. This results in a roller coaster ride of joys and sorrows.

But if we take a truly objective look at this situation, it turns out that we are looking for perfection in the material world, which will always be imperfect. Shri Krishna says here that the only way to get to the root of this problem is to remove our ignorance of the eternal essence.

jnyaanena : through knowledge
tu : for
tat : that
ajnyaanam : ignorance
yeshaam : those who have
naashitam : destroyed
aatmanaha : their
teshaam : for them
aadityavat : like the sun
jnyaanam : knowledge
prakashayati : illumines
tat : that
param : eternal essence

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 5

tadbuddhyastadaatmanaastannishthaastatparayaanaaha |
gacchantyapunaraavrittim jnyaanirdhootakalmashaaha || 17 ||

His intellect lies in that, his mind lies in that, his conviction lies in that, his goal lies in that. He reaches that state from which there is no return, (due to) his sins removed by knowledge.

tadbuddhyaha : intellect lies in that
 tadaatmanaaha : mind lies in that
 tannishthaaha : conviction lies in that
 tatparayaanaaha : goal lies in that
 gacchanti : reaches that state
 apunaraavrittim : from which there is no return
 jnyaanirdhoota : knowledge removes
 kalmashaaha : sins

Many years ago, I was talking to a renowned musician who made a statement that stuck with me: "You know you are a true musician when you breathe, eat, sleep, walk and talk music. There is nothing in your life but music". That statement reveals how much thirst a person has for his goal.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna illustrates the personality of the seeker whose aspiration for the eternal essence is so intense that his entire personality resonates with that thirst for the eternal essence. His mind, intellect, conviction, goal - all these are aligned with the eternal essence.

It is important that both the mind and intellect need to be convinced that the only goal worth pursuing is the eternal essence, even if the eternal essence has not yet been realized. It is like the scientists who planned the mission to the moon, yet none of them had ever been on the moon. The mind needs to have love for the moon, and the intellect needs to enjoy the intellectual challenge that the task entails. If only the mind is convinced, it could lead into superstition. If only the intellect is convinced, it could lead into nihilism. Only when mind and intellect are convinced is when the whole personality is oriented towards the eternal essence.

So then, what happens to such a person with intense thirst for the eternal essence? Once he gains the knowledge of the eternal essence, he transcends all duality, including the notion of sins and demerits. Poetically, Shri Krishna puts it as the "state from which there is no return", because all notions of duality have completely disappeared.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 5

*vidyavinayasampanne braamhane gavi hastini |
shuni chaiva shvapaake cha panditaaha samadarshinaha || 18 ||*

A braahman endowed with knowledge and sense control, a cow, an elephant, a dog, even a dog-eater - the wise person perceives (all these) as one.

Shri Krishna further elaborates on the vision of a realized seeker in this shloka. Unlike most of us how tend to focus on the differences, the realized seeker focuses on the eternal essence which is common in every plant, animal, human, situation and inanimate object. In chapter two, we saw the example of the child who want a cookie shaped like a lion, whereas the adult does not really care because his focus is in the dough that is common within each cookie.

A spectrum of entities has been laid out before us, from the braahman that has a high level of sattva, to a cow that has lesser sattvic content, all the way to an individual with a miniscule, almost non-existent level of sattva. Shri Krishna says that the wise person sees the eternal essence in all of them.

This ability to see the oneness is all is praised throughout our scriptures. In the Raamaayana, Tulsidaas says the one should view both friends and enemies equally. Why? Because when enemies leave, they give sorrow. But when friends leave, they too give sorrow. It is just a matter of perspective.

Now, just because the wise person views everyone with a similar vision does not mean he treats them similarly, or deals with them similarly. He will deal with a dog differently than how he would treat a braahman. How is it possible? It is just like we see our body as one, but we treat our eye differently then we would treat the soles of our feet.

vidya : knowledge
vinaya : sense controlled
sampanne : endowed with
braamhane : a braahman
gavi : a cow
hastini : an elephant
shuni : a dog
cha : and
eva : even
shvapaake : dog-eater
cha : and
panditaaha : wise person
samadarshinaha : perceives as one

Notes

1. "Vinaya" usually means humility, but it is translated as sense control in the context of this shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 5

*ihaiva tairjitaha sargo yeshaam saamyē sthitam manaha |
nirdosham hi samam brahma tasmaadbrahmani te sthitaaha || 19 ||*

Here in this world itself, they have conquered creation, those who establish their intellect in equanimity. For, the eternal essence is defect-free and harmonious; therefore, they are established in the eternal essence.

In the last shloka, Shri Krishna spoke about the wise person who sees the same eternal essence in everyone. Here, he goes deeper into this point and addresses some questions that could come up when trying to understand that shloka.

Consider a hardened criminal. Most of us would classify his behaviour as defective. Now, given the context of the previous shloka where the wise person perceives a criminal and a saint with the same vision. How does it actually happen? To address this point, Shri Krishna mentions in this shloka that the personality of the criminal has the defect, not the eternal essence. The eternal essence is inherently defect-free.

Another question that may arise is this. When and where does one attain the eternal essence? How much time will it take and how far away is it? The answer is that notions such as near/far, and slow/fast are dualities. Any such duality belongs to nature, not the eternal essence. Therefore, one whose intellect has transcended duality immediately attains the eternal essence. Notions such as near/far, and slow/fast cease to have meaning.

Finally, Shri Krishna explains that attaining the eternal essence is possible here and now. We do not have to wait for another birth. Following the technique of karma yoga, we have to purify our mind and make it steady and harmonious, so that it can meditate on the eternal essence.

iha : here in this world
eva : itself
taiha : they
jitaha : have won
sargaha : creation / duality
yeshaam : those who
saamyē : equanimity
sthitam : established in
manaha : intellect
nirdosham : defect-free
hi : for
samam : harmonious
brahma : eternal essence
tasmaad : therefore
brahmani : in the eternal essence
te : they
sthitaaha : are established

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 5

*na prahrishyetapriyam praapya nodvijetpraapya chaapriyam |
sthirabuddhirasammoodho brahmavid brahmani sthitha || 20 ||*

Having obtained a desirable situation, he does not get elated; nor does he get perturbed if it is undesirable. The person of steady intellect is never deluded; the knower of the eternal essence is established in the eternal essence.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna emphasizes the realized seeker's outlook towards situations in the material world. Like any other person, the realized seeker encounters pleasant and unpleasant situations. He cannot avoid them. But the difference is that these situations do not destabilize the realized seeker. In other words, they do not cause elation or depression.

Usually, when something undesirable happens to someone that we do not know, it does not affect us. But if it happens to us - say we fall sick - it affects us deeply. But the wise person has transcended the ego. He recognizes that every situation is part of nature. In nature, elements are interacting with the elements in multiple configurations. Once he has this vision, happenings of the world do not impact the realized seeker.

It is important to note that situations, both good and bad, have their place in our lives. Unpleasant experiences are useful from relative world perspective because they usually have a lesson embedded within them. With each unpleasant situation the emotion of sadness will arise. But in a realized seeker there will be a space between the emotion and the self. For example, if we are on a boat, the ups and downs of the sea will impact us. But if we are standing on a rock on the shore, the ups and downs of sea do not affect us.

Why do realized seekers remain unperturbed? Their understanding of the eternal essence has become stable and firm. They have become "sthitha prajnya". They are free from the delusion of doership and enjoyership. Initially, when this knowledge is first gained, it stays on the surface. We experience the eternal essence sporadically, for a brief instance, then immediately go back into identification with the body/mind/intellect.

na : does not
prahrishyet : get elated
priyam : desirable
praapya : obtains
na : does not
udvijet : get perturbed
praapya : obtains
cha : and
apriyam : undesirable
sthirabuddhih : with steady intellect
asammoodhaha : without delusion
brahmavid : the knower of the eternal essence
brahmani : in the eternal essence
sthitha : is established

Notes

1. Tulsidas has said that the ocean remains same in rain or drought, but a small lake overflows and dries up. It is a simple yet powerful example of the difference between a realized seeker's vision and an ordinary person's vision.

So therefore, the one who constantly maintains the identification of the eternal essence becomes one with the eternal essence. He remains a pure witness of the ups and downs of the material world.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 21, Chapter 5

*baahyasparsheshvasaktaatmaa vindatyaatmani yatsukham |
sa brahmayogayuktaatmaa sukhamakshayamashrute || 21 ||*

One who is not attached to external sense-contacts finds inner bliss. Such a person, established in contemplation of the eternal essence, experiences inexhaustible joy.

So far, Shri Krishna explained the vision of a realized seeker. From this shloka onwards, he starts turning us towards the topic of meditation. Turning oneself inwards, away from the sense objects of the world, is the first step towards meditation. To this end, he explains the reason for turning inward.

Our entire life is geared towards the pursuit of happiness. However, if we introspect, we realize that the happiness we get from sense objects such as tasty food or a visually appealing movie is instantaneous, but fleeting. Sense objects are finite, and so is the happiness that they can provide. Moreover, if we are not careful, we get attached to whatever gives us instant happiness so that we can repeat that experience. This also leads to sorrow, which comes from constant commentary and judgement from intellect when we lose access to sense objects.

But Shri Krishna gives us a better alternative. When we slowly move away from sense objects and turn inward to contemplate on the eternal essence, we can tap into a source of happiness that is much greater than any happiness produced by sense objects. Moreover, this happiness is never-ending, it is inexhaustible, because it is derived out of the eternal essence which is infinite.

baahyasparsheshu : external sense
contacts
asaktaatmaa : person without attachment
vindati : finds
aatmani : inner
yat : one who
sukham : bliss
saha : that person
brahmayogayuktaatmaa : established in
contemplation of the eternal essence
sukham : joy
akshayam : inexhaustible
ashrute : experiences

Bhagavad Gita Verse 22, Chapter 5

*ye hi samsparshajaa bhogaa duhkhkhayonaya eva te |
aadyantavantaha kaunteyane teshu ramate budhaha || 22 ||*

For, the pleasures born out of sense contact are only wombs of sorrow. They have a beginning and ending, O son of Kunti. The wise person does not revel in them.

ye : he
hi : for
samsparshajaa : born from sense contact
bhogaa : pleasures
duhkhkhayonaya : wombs of sorrow
eva : only
te : they
aadyantavantaha : have a beginning and ending
kaunteyane : O son of Kunti
teshu : in them
ramate : revel
budhaha : the wise person

Previously, we saw the need for the seeker to turn inward, away from the sense pleasures of the material world. Here, Shri Krishna provides another compelling reason to turn away from sense pleasures. He says, in no uncertain terms, that pleasures born out of sense contact are not really pleasures at all. They are not just sorrow disguised as pleasure, they are "wombs" of sorrow. Which means, a single experience of sense contact sows the seed for multiple sorrows.

For many of us, the period of transition between academic life and work life is when a lot of these seeds are sown. As we start earning money, we automatically seem to find outlets to spend this money. Some develop an attachment to high-end coffee. Some develop an attachment to going to clubs. Some develop a taste for vehicles and so on. If we introspect, we realize that the pleasure obtained by any of these objects is not just fleeting, but results in a chain of sorrow later. Take high-end coffee for instance. The first few times it is quite pleasurable. But later, you cannot do without it.

But then, where does the pleasure arise in the first place? The mind is restless without constant sense contact. Depending upon the strength of the vaasanaas that we have cultivated, it experiences a vacuum and rushes out into the material world towards an object in order to fill that vacuum. At the same time, the eternal essence present within us, having identified with the mind, also rushes out into the world. When the sense contact happens, the mind temporarily ceases to move outside and comes into contact with the eternal essence. This results in joy.

So, here is where the mix-up happens. The joy was already inside us, the mind causes us to believe that it is outside us. Furthermore, this joy is short-lived because the mind will again go out into the material world. Then the cycle of sorrow (vacuum) and joy (sense contact) will repeat itself. This is called "samsaara".

Therefore, Shri Krishna urges us to become wise people and realize that sense contact is not the true source of joy. Next, Shri Krishna goes into the root cause of the mind rushing out into the world.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 23, Chapter 5

*shoknotihaiva yaha sodhum praakshareeravimokshanaat |
kaamakrodhaadbhavam vegam sa yuktaha sa sukhee naraha || 23 ||*

He who, even before this body departs, is capable of withstanding the impulse born out of desire and anger; that person is a yogi, that person is blissful.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna points out exactly why does the mind rush out into the material world. He says that in a person who working towards purifying his mind, there still exists two major obstacles to realization: desire and anger. Both of these generate impulses that cause the mind to go out into the material world. Even though the seeker cannot get rid of desire and anger, but can check the impulses caused by them, that person will attain happiness from within than from without.

Let's examine what exactly is desire and anger in the framework of the Gita. Whenever one encounters sense pleasures, or recalls a memory of a sense pleasure, the need to re-experience that sense pleasure is called desire. Conversely, whenever one encounters a sorrowful circumstance, or recalls a sorrowful memory, the repulsion generated is called anger. Both these emotions generate impulses to chase after, or run away from an object, person or circumstance. For the mind to realize the eternal essence, it needs to be even-keel. But these impulses take the mind outwards and destabilize it.

Now, there is a possibility of a Catch-22 situation here. There will be an impulse within us to seek joy. Unless we redirect it inward, it will always rush outward. But if we redirect it inward and it does not find joy, it will again go outward. Therefore, turning this impulse inward has to be done intelligently. If all we do is cut ourselves off from the objects that give us pleasure, it will not work. Instead, we must work diligently towards purification of our mind and performance of *svaadhyaya*, whether it is reading of scriptures, or *pooja* and so on. As our mind finds exponentially more joy in *svaadhyaya*, it will automatically turn inwards and drop its fascination with external objects.

The next two shlokas describe the state of the person who finds inner bliss.

shoknoti : capable of
iha : this body
eva : even
yaha : he who
sodhum : can withstand
praak : before
shareera : body
vimokshanaat : departs
kaamakrodhaadbhavam : born out of
desire and anger
vegam : impulse
sa : that is
yuktaha : is a yogi
sa : that is
sukhee : blissful
naraha : person

Bhagavad Gita Verse 24, Chapter 5

yontahasukhontaraaraamastathaantarjyotireva yaha |
sa yogi brahmanirvaanam brahmabhootodhigachchati || 24 ||

One who finds bliss in the self, who revels in his self, whose knowledge is the self; he is a yogi, and attains liberation through identification with the eternal essence.

Shri Krishna now starts describing how one who is established in the eternal essence eventually attains the eternal essence, in other words, is liberated. The word yogi here refers to a realized seeker. The entire personality of such a seeker is completely turned inward toward the eternal essence. This state is described by three words: antahasukhaha, antaraaraamaha and antarjyotihi.

The person who finds bliss within is called antahasukhaha. He does not expect anything from the outside world. The idea that something other than himself will make him happy, that idea has completely gone. To recap a point from the earlier shloka, he experience bliss by seeking positivity within him, it is not negating what is outside. It is like the sun reflected in water. The reflection will never match the brightness of the sun itself. Similarly the joy obtained through the senses is "reflected happiness". But a yogi who has shifted attention to his inner self gets the real deal.

Typically, our mind needs to constantly come into contact with an object, person or situation. This causes agitation in our minds. However, objects, people and situations keep changing. The economy changes, our friends change, our health changes and so on. But the realized seeker is antaraaraamaha. He revels in himself. Another way to look at this word is "antara-aarama", which means that he rests in himself. He has eliminated all agitations and is completely at ease with himself. There is nothing that compels him to do anything, he just "is".

Furthermore, the realized seeker stops looking towards more and more sources of knowledge. He is antarjyotihi. He knows that the eternal essence alone is the ultimate knowledge, the ultimate source of light. In most traditional temples, the only source of light is inside the central room where the deity is located. Symbolically, it depicts the internal light of the self.

yaha : one who
antahasukhaha : inner bliss
antaraaraamaha : revels in his inner self
tathaa : and
eva : only
yaha : he who
saha : that person
yogi : true seeker
brahma : eternal essence
nirvaanam : liberated
brahmabhootaha : identified with the
eternal essence
adhigachchati : attains

In this manner, one who is happy in his own self, revels in his own self and finds knowledge in one's own self, such a person is a true enlightened seeker. By such deep identification with the eternal essence, he becomes the eternal essence. In other words, he attains the ultimate liberation or "nirvaana". Liberation is the destruction of all limitations and all notions of finitude. It is the realization that what is in oneself is the same as what is in everything else.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 25, Chapter 5

*labhante brahmanirvaanamrishayaha ksheenakalmashaaha |
chhinnadvaidhaa yataatmaanaha sarvabhootahite rataaha || 25 ||*

The wise seeker, whose defects have been destroyed, who has eliminated all doubts, who has complete control over his self, who is engaged in the welfare of all beings; he obtains liberation.

labhante : obtains
brahmanirvaanam : ultimate liberation
rishayaha : that wise seeker
ksheena : have been destroyed
kalmashaaha : all defects
chhinnadvaidhaa : all doubts have been eliminated
yataatmaanaha : who has complete control over his self
sarvabhoota : all beings
hite : welfare
rataaha : engaged

In this shloka, Shri Krishna further explains the nature of one who is liberated by establishing himself in the eternal essence. Such a liberated seeker is called a "rishi". It means one who knows, one who has knowledge of the eternal essence. Typically, we think of a rishi as someone who has a beard and wears a robe. It is not so. A rishi uses knowledge and discrimination constantly and knows the difference between the real and the unreal. Such a rishi has four attributes per this shloka: free of all defects, free from all doubts, complete self control, and engaged in the welfare of all beings.

The rishi is "ksheena-kalmasha", which means that he has freed himself of all mental impurities. The core or the key mental impurity is ignorance which manifests in the form of affinity for worldly pleasures. It is ignorance alone from which all impurities are others based off. It is through karmayoga that we rid ourselves of all mental impurities.

Next, the rishi is "chhinna-dvaidah". He is free from all doubts regarding who is really is. Until the mind has doubts, the notion that "I am the eternal essence" will come and go, but it will not be permanent. There will be no conviction behind it. Desires that push us out into the world are the obstruction to such a permanent conviction. "Chhinna - dvaidah" also means free of all notions of duality.

"Yataatmaanah" is another word used to describe the rishi. He has complete self control, in other words, he has complete control over his mind and senses. He is not like most of us who are under the mind's control. The rishi know that the body, mind and senses are different than his true self which is the eternal essence. Once he realizes that they are different than him and have no relation to him, he does not come under their control.

Furthermore, the rishi is "sarva bhuta hite rataah", which means that

he is always engaged in the welfare of all. Now this does not mean necessarily that he is engaged in social service. It means that the rishi is always in a state of total non-violence. He sees no distinction between himself, one person and another person. It is like water and the fish. Regardless of what the fish does, the water lives in total harmony with the fish. One has no fear for the other.

So therefore, such a rishi is the one who is fit to attain liberation, where he dissolves himself into the eternal essence, just like a wave dissolves into the ocean.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 26, Chapter 5

*kaamakrodhaviyuktaanaam yateenaam yatachetasaam |
abhito brahmanirvaanam vartate viditaatmanaam || 26 ||*

One who is free from desire and anger, one who has subdued the mind; for that seeker who has realized the eternal essence, ultimate liberation exists from all sides.

kaamakrodha : desire and anger
viyuktaanaam : free from
yateenaam : seeker
yatachetasaam : one who has subdued the mind
abhitha : from all sides
brahmanirvaanam : ultimate liberation
vartate : exists
viditaatmanaam : one who has realized the eternal essence

With this shloka, Shri Krishna concludes the teachings of the fifth chapter. In this shloka, he provides the last set of attributes of the person who has attained liberation by establishing himself in the eternal essence. He says that such a person is free from desire and aversion due to his control of his mind and intellect.

Like we saw in the previous shloka, ignorance of the true nature of oneself is the critical defect of the mind. It is this ignorance alone that creates desire and aversion. We do not find pleasure within ourselves, so we rush outside with desire. If the desire is not obtained, we get irritated and angry. This is the life of an ignorant person in a nutshell. It is the constant seeking of pleasure, and getting annoyed when pleasure is not obtained. So the wise person, having removed his ignorance, is free from desire and anger.

So then, to conclude the chapter's teachings, Shri Krishna says that such a wise person - one who has identified with the eternal essence - obtains liberation from all sides. In other words, such a wise person is liberated while he is living, and remains liberated after he dies.

The Gita prescribes a step-by-step approach to liberation, which is elaborated in various chapters throughout the text. It begins with karma yoga, where a seeker follows his svadharma to purify his mind and prepare it for instruction. Next, he receives instruction and knowledge on the eternal essence through shravana (hearing), manana (clearing doubts through self-inquiry) and nidhidhyaasana (internalization). The last step of internalization is accomplished through dhyana yoga or meditation, which is the topic of the next chapter.

But before we begin the next chapter, Shri Krishna provides a preview of dhyana yoga in the next and last three shlokas of this chapter.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 27, Chapter 5

*sparshaankritvaa bahirbaahyaanshchakshushchaivaantare bhruvooha |
praanaapaanau samau kritvaa naasaabhyantarachaarinau || 27 ||*

Keeping external sense objects outside, and eyes in the center of the eyebrows, and also equalizing the incoming and outgoing flow of breath inside the nostrils;

Shri Krishna gives a preview of the upcoming chapter on dhyana yoga or meditation in this and the next shloka. He explains the technique of meditation in a nutshell, but goes into the details in the next chapter. In a nutshell, the technique involves clearing the mind of all external sense object impressions, keeping eyes focused on one point, and equalizing the incoming and outgoing breath.

The eternal essence cannot be realized if the mind is dwelling on sense objects, therefore the technique requires us to temporarily cut off connection with sense objects. Practically, we cannot shut off the world completely i.e. if we hear a sound somewhere, it will enter into our ears. The point is that we should not let our mind chase any sense perception. Further, even if the mind is not receiving sensory inputs, it should be restrained from going into the past or the future.

Next, Shri Krishna asks us to focus the eyes in the middle of the eyebrows. This is because the eyes follow the mind and its thoughts. If the mind is restless, the eyes will wander. So keeping the eyes steady has the effect of stabilizing the mind. In the same way, if the mind is restless, it is reflected in the breath. So we are asked to balance the incoming and outgoing breath with the aim of calming the mind. If the breathing becomes harmonious, we know that the mind has become calm.

So in this manner, Shri Krishna describes how we should physically prepare ourself for meditation. In the next shloka, he points out the internal preparation. We notice that this shloka ends in mid-sentence. The rest of the sentence is found in the next shloka.

sparshaan : sense objects
kritvaa : keeping
bahihi : outside
baahyaan : external
chakshuhu : eyes
cha : and
eva : also
antare : center
bhruvooha : the eyebrows
praanaapaanau : incoming and outgoing breath
samau : equal
kritvaa : making
naasa : nostrils
abhyantara : inside
chaarinau : flow of breath through nostrils

Bhagavad Gita Verse 28, Chapter 5

*yatendriyamanobuddhirmunirmokshaparaayanaha |
vigatechhaabhayakrodo yaha sadaa mukta eva saha || 28 ||*

That person who has restrained his senses, mind and intellect, and whose ultimate goal is liberation, who is devoid of desire, fear and anger; that person is also a monk, he is ever liberated.

munihi : monk
moksha : liberation
paraayanaha: ultimate goal
vigata : devoid
ichhaa : desire
bhayaha : fear
krodaha : anger
yaha : one who
sadaa : ever
mukta : liberated
eva : also
saha : that person

Shri Krishna continues the preview of steps needed for preparing ourselves for meditation. The "that person" refers to the person from the previous shloka who has prepared himself physically for meditation. Now, the internal preparation is pointed out.

First, Shri Krishna says that while sitting for meditation, there should be no other objective but that of liberation. If the objective is not pure, if one wants to harm someone by meditation, then the practice will be distracted and the goal will not be reached. In the Puraanic literature, there are many examples of demons that practiced meditation for powers that would help them destroy others. Such goals are not to be harboured. The only goal should be liberation.

Also important is the role that we identify with when we sit for meditation. If sit down as father, we will always think of children. If sit down as an employee, we will think of job-related problems all the time. These roles do not go away easily due to our strong identification with one or many roles. There should be no role while meditation, only the goal of liberation.

So therefore, one who through karmayoga and purified his mind of fear, anger and desire, who has restrained his sense organs, and whose ultimate goal is liberation and not some worldly goal, that person is ready for meditation. But what is the object of meditation? The last shloka of this chapter addresses this point.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 29, Chapter 5

*bhoktaram yajnyatapasaam sarvalokamaheshwaram
suhridam sarvabhootaanaam jnyaatvaa maam shaantimrichhati || 29 ||*

bhoktaram : recipient
yajnyatapasaam : of sacrifices and
austerities
sarvalokamaheshwaram : controller of
all worlds
suhridam : well-wisher
sarvabhootaanaam : of all beings
jnyaatvaa : having known
maam : me
shaantim : peace
richhati : attain

Having known me as the recipient of sacrifices and austerities, as the controller of all worlds, and as the well-wisher of all beings, (he) will attain peace.

In the prior two shlokas, Shri Krishna provided a preview of meditation. In this shloka, he gives us the objective of meditation. In other words, this shloka tells us what one comes to know in the state of meditation. This shloka is a preview of the topic covered in the seventh chapter to the twelfth chapter, which is the elaboration of Ishvara.

The goal of meditation is to realize the eternal essence. It is akin to a wave that realizes its identity with water. In this manner, the wave realizes that it is no longer the finite entity that it once was. It is one wave but also it is many waves. It is the entire ocean. Similarly, once the meditator realizes oneness with brahman or the eternal essence (water) , he attains Ishvara (ocean).

Who exactly is Ishvara is covered in the chapters seven through twelve. Only few of his attributes are covered here. First, he is the cosmic enjoyer or the cosmic recipient. Any work that is performed for the welfare of society is automatically dedicated to Ishvara. This was the theme of the third chapter on karmayoga where we are advised to act in a selfless manner, and dedicate the results of our actions to a higher ideal. Ishvara is the highest ideal possible because he encompasses the entire cosmos.

Next, Ishvara is called the controller of all beings. Through prakriti or maaya, Ishvara manifests as the laws or rules by which our lives as well as the lives of plants, animals and inert objects are governed. We saw earlier that the universe functions through inherent laws such as gravity and electromagnetism. In that regard, Ishvara through these laws controls us.

Finally, Ishvara's laws are fair. They treat everyone equally. They work without any expectation or ulterior motive. They also work non-stop, just like our heart beats and our breath functions all the time. In this manner, Ishvara is the highest well-wisher and friend of all beings. If

we too make friends with Ishvara, which is another way of saying that we work in the best interest of the world, we do not have to worry about our well-being. Ishvara takes care of us.

So therefore, one who comes to know the eternal essence, and realizes his unity with Ishvara during meditation, attains peace. This is the concluding message of the fifth chapter of the Gita.

<i>om tatsatiti shrimadbhagavadgitasu upanishadsu brahmavidyayaam
yogashastre shrikrishnaarjunasamvade</i>

<i>karmasanyaasayogonaamo panchamodhyaahaha || 5 ||</i>

Summary Of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 5

The fifth chapter titled "Karma Sanyaasa Yoga" began with Arjuna's question to Shri Krishna. The question was : what was better, renouncing all actions and becoming a monk, or performing actions as a karma yogi? Shri Krishna addressed this question by reiterating a nuance that Arjuna had missed.

Renouncing of actions did not mean giving up the physical performance of actions, it meant renouncing the sense of doership, the sense that "I am doing something". In order to get to this stage, one has to have purified one's mind completely of desires. In that regards, performing actions in the spirit of karmayoga was the correct course of action for Arjuna, since he still harboured desires. As one continues to dedicate the result of actions to Ishvara, one's sense of enjoyership and doership automatically diminishes.

Next, Shri Krishna expounded upon the vision of realized seeker. He provided a detailed illustration of body, mind and intellect functioning on their own, including the acts of perception, cognition and intellect's response to stimuli. All these acts in reality happen without the involvement of "I". The illustration that the "I" resides in a city of nine gates was given to further drive home the point.

Another aspect of the realized seeker's vision is his "sama drishti" or the sameness of vision. The realized seeker sees the same eternal essence in a human, elephant, dog, dog eater. Not only that, he also sees the same eternal essence in positive and negative experiences. He holds the convictions that these "defects" or modifications are part of prakriti. He does not view these defects as part of the eternal essence since the eternal essence is ever perfect.

Then Shri Krishna explained that just like the eternal essence in the body does not cause action, so too does the eternal essence at the cosmic level not cause action. Neither does the eternal essence connect results to actions, nor does it dole out sin and merit. All these transaction happen inside prakriti or nature. The example of the Pac Man video game was given in order to illustrate that prakriti is an automated system that works just like a video game. It rewards and punishes actions based on well-defined rules, without the need for external intervention.

In the closing shlokas of the fifth chapter, Shri Krishna slowly begins pointing us toward meditation. Meditation is the only way for

the seeker to get fully established in the eternal essence. The primary goal has to be the realization of eternal essence and nothing else, this thirst is needed. Next, Shri Krishna informs us that it is the sense contacts that are obstacles to meditation. Our mind rushes out due to the urges generated desire and anger. Only by controlling this urge can we progress towards meditation.

Lastly, Shri Krishna elaborates on the state of a liberated seeker. Such a seeker has discovered the infinite joy within himself. He finds no need to rush outside into the world for joy and bliss.



Dhyaana Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 6**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**anaashritaha karmaphalam kaaryam karma karoti yaha |
sa sannyasi cha yogi cha na niragnirana chaakriyaha || 1 ||*

anaashritaha : without reliance upon
 karmaphalam : results of action
 kaaryam : obligatory
 karma : actions
 karoti : performing
 yaha : one who
 saha : that person
 sannyasi : is a monk
 cha : and
 yogi : is a yogi
 cha : also
 na : not
 niragnirana : one who has renounced
 fire
 cha : and
 akriyaha : one who has renounced
 action

One who performs obligatory action, without reliance upon results of action, that person is a monk as well as a yogi; not one who has renounced fire or action.

Shri Krishna begins the sixth chapter titled "Dhyaana Yoga" or yoga of meditation by redefining what is meant by a monk and a dhyana yogi or meditator. He says that one who performs actions in the spirit of karmayoga, per his definition, is both a monk and a meditator. The meditator is not one who has given up his duties or actions, who has run away from the world.

Meditation is a topic that fascinates everyone. We like the idea of going to a retreat, away from all our troubles, and sit in a tranquil place to meditate. But as we shall see in the rest of this chapter, Shri Krishna has a unique viewpoint about the process of meditation, and of who is qualified to become a meditator. He first says that only one who is engaged in the expression of his desires through karmayoga, through the performance of svadharma, is a good meditator.

As long as our vaasanaas or our impressions exist, they will continue to generate desires that will propel us away from the inner self and out into the world. They will make us restless and agitated. So the karmayogi intelligently channels these desires and expresses these desires. The key point is that the results of actions generated by these desires are submitted to a higher ideal, so that the results lose their power to create further selfish desires. As our attachment to results drops, the mental restlessness and agitations diminish, making us fit to pursue meditation.

Shri Krishna drives home the point with two examples. First, he says that one does not have to renounce fire in order to perform meditation. In the olden days, householders would maintain a sacrificial fire in their homes. Absence of the fire indicated renouncing the duties of a householder. In other words, Shri Krishna says that one does not have to give up their household duties for pursuing meditation. Second, one does not have to physically renounce action and retire to a

monastery to meditate. The culmination of karmayoga is the loss of sense of doership. This is the qualification of a meditator.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 6

*yam sannyaasamiti praahuryogam tam viddhi paandava |
na hyasannyastasankalpo yogi bhavati kashchana | 12 |*

In this manner, that which is called renunciation, know that to be the same as yoga, O Paandava. For without renunciation of desires, one cannot become a yogi.

kashchana : cannot |

Shri Krishna further elaborates on the definition of a sannyaasi or a monk in this shloka. He says that the karmayogi and sannyaasi are, at their core, one and the same. One need not renounce the world in order to become a dhyana yogi or a meditator. All one needs to do is to follow the path of karmayoga diligently. Only when the tendency to create new desires or sankalpa goes away can one become a meditator.

How can the action-oriented karmayogi and the actionless-oriented monk be the same? Let us investigate. It is only when the mind of the seeker is free of sankalpa does he become ready for meditation. Meditation can occur only when the mind is tranquil. Tranquility only occurs when the mind is rid of all desires. Now the question arises that how do we know whether such tranquility exists? Have we experienced it? Yes we have. Once we finally get an object that we were craving for a long time, our mind experiences tranquility for a fraction of a second. This is caused due to a temporary cessation of desires, and ends when new desires start agitating the mind again.

If one has reached an advanced stage in the spiritual journey where desires have gone down to a minimum, one becomes actionless automatically. We saw this in the fifth chapter. But if one still harbours desires, karmayoga is the means to slowly diminish desires through renouncing the results of action. So what needs to be renounced is attachment to results of action, not action itself. This recurring message drives home the point that action-orientation and actionless-orientation are the same, as long as the attachment to results is renounced. They both have the same effect: tranquility of mind.

yam : that which
sannyasam : renunciation
iti : in this manner
praahuhu : call
yogam : yoga
tam : that same thing
viddhi : know that
paandava : O Paandava
na : not
hi : for
asannyasta : without renouncing
sankalpo : desires
yogi : yogi
bhavati : become

Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 6

*aarurukshormuneryogam karma kaaranamuchyate |
yogaroodhasya tasyaiva shamah kaaranamuchyate || 3 ||*

For that contemplative person who desires to ascend to yoga, action is said to be the means. For one who is established in yoga, tranquility is said to be the means.

In the shlokas so far, Shri Krishna has pointed out the similarity between a karmayogi and a monk in regards to their suitability for practicing meditation. Now, he begins to go one level deeper and tell us where we stand, and how should we prepare ourselves for meditation.

Let's first understand what is meant by a muni or a contemplative person. Most people in this world harbour the notion that worldly objects, people and situations yield happiness. The contemplative person is one who has spent enough time observing the world and understood that notion to be false. He need not have retreated to the forest to contemplate on this. He knows from his daily life experience that the world cannot give joy. Such a muni, who has the desire to go higher, ascend above the material world, is called "aarurkshoho".

So for such a muni, there are two possibilities. One is that he is not established in dhyana yoga or meditation. His mind still harbours desires. His proportion of sattva guna is lower compared to rajas and tamas. For such a seeker, the only means to get established in meditation is karmayoga. Diligent observance of karmayoga will develop the qualities of discrimination and dispassion (viveka and vairagya), which will ultimately purge desires from the mind.

The second possibility is the muni who has achieved a high level of viveka and vairagya. His mind does not harbour desires due to the predominance of sattva. He only performs the bare minimum of actions that are in line with his obligatory duties. Such a person is "aarudha" or elevated. For such a person, meditation will come naturally. All he has to do is to follow the instructions given later in this chapter towards "shamaha", which is quietening the mind.

Consider this illustration. When a child wants to ride a heavy bicycle, he usually cannot climb it directly. He has to put one foot on the pedal and kick the ground with the other foot till the bicycle gathers

aarurukshoho : one who desires to ascend
munehe : contemplative person
yogam : yoga
karma : action
kaaranam : means
uchyate : is said to be
yogaroodhasya : one who is established in yoga
tasya : that person
eva : only
shamah : tranquility
kaaranam : means
uchyate : is said to be

speed. Only then can he climb the bicycle. So in the initial stage, the child is "aarurkshoho" and has to kick the ground until the bike gathers speed. Then when he ascends the bicycle, he becomes "aarudha".

Now, when exactly does the seeker become ready to meditate? This is tackled in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 6

*yada hi nendriyaartheshu na karmasvanushajjate |
sarvasankalpasannyasi yogaaroodhastadochyate || 4 ||*

yada : when
hi : for
na : not
indriyaartheshu : in sense objects
na : not
karmasu : in actions
anushajjate : attached to
sarva : all
sannyasi : one who has renounced
yogaaroodhaha : established in yoga
tadaa : at that time
uchyate : is called

When one does not find attachment in sense objects and in actions, when one has renounced all projections, at that time one is said to have been established in yoga.

Having introduced the qualification of a meditator to be "yogaaroodha", Shri Krishna now explains what that term really means. He says that it refers to a person who no longer gets attracted or attached to sense objects and actions. This happens because that person finds contentment within himself and does not need to rush out into the world, in other words, he does not have sankalpas.

So far we have understood sankalpa to mean desire. Now, let us understand the deeper meaning of sankalpa. As we have seen throughout the Gita, ignorance of our true self is the root cause of all our sorrows. Ignorance makes us think that we are incomplete. It causes desires that push the mind to go outward to seek happiness. This outward projection is called sankalpa. Typically, sankalpa is seen in the urge to give undue importance to objects, and to actions.

No matter how much we want to deny it, each one of us has a weakness for certain material objects. We think that those objects will give us happiness, peace, security, stability and so on. But if we follow path of karmayoga diligently, the undue importance we place on objects slowly diminishes.

As an example, compare the experience of a child walking in a toy-store to that of an adult doing the same thing. The minute the child enters into the store, each object pulls the child towards itself, as it were. The pull is so strong that the child thinks that he cannot live without these toys. A multitude of desires get generated in his mind. He gets excited and restless. But if an adult walks into the toy store, he may very well appreciate the toys, but there is no urge or force that compels him to get attached to any toy. Once our outlook towards all objects of the world is like that adult in a toy store, we are fit for meditation.

Similarly, we have a fascination towards performance of actions. But

when we deeply examine our actions, we realize that most of these are performed due to a herd mentality, in other words, because everyone else is doing it, and because we think we will be left out of a group if we do not perform those actions. Many of us pursue educational and career paths by emulating what someone else had done.

Another reason that we perform actions is for strengthening our ego (asmita). Our ego puffs up when we say "I did this". We forget that actions are part of nature, that they are happening of their own accord. For instance, we do not boast when we have taken a shower or when one of our hands puts a bandage on another hand. So it is only when we have a similar attitude towards all actions that we perform, that we become fit for meditation.

A child eventually stops putting his finger in the fire, having burned it each time. Similarly our sankalpa, our need to act for gaining objects diminishes as the wisdom gained through contemplation increases. When this wisdom dawns and we diminish our attachment to action and objects, we become yogaroodha or established in dhyaana yoga. In other words, we become qualified for meditation.

This journey to meditation seems arduous. How can we get some support? Who can help us? The next shloka goes into this topic.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 6

*uddharedaatmanaatmaanam naatmaanamavasaadayet |
aatmaiva hyaatmano bandhuraatmaiva ripuraatmanaha || 6 ||*

Uplift yourself by yourself, do not deprecate yourself. For only you are your friend, and only you are your enemy.

Shri Krishna gives us a powerful message in this shloka. He says that in order to progress in the spiritual path, in fact, any undertaking, we have to lift ourselves by our own efforts. We are our own friend if we do so, and if we don't, we become our own enemy. In other words, our success and failure is entirely in our hands. No other person can help or hurt us.

In previous chapters we encountered the hierarchy of our personality. At the lowest level exist the body and the sense organs. They have the tendency to go out into the world and seek the objects they desire. The eyes desire pleasant images, the tongue desires pleasant tastes and so on. This is our "lower self". Higher than the body and the senses lies the mind. It is the seat of our thoughts and desires. Higher than the mind is the intellect that can make rational decisions. The eternal essence, our higher self, is at the very highest level.

Now, the sense organs are very powerful. Usually, for most of us, the senses forcefully drag the mind out into the world in order to encounter one sense pleasure after another. This is what Shri Krishna calls "deprecation" in the shloka. It means the tendency of the mind to go lower. But in the intellect that has cultivated discrimination through study of right knowledge, the mind encounters a struggle. It has to choose between being dragged forcefully into the senses, or uplifting itself towards the intellect, and then ultimately towards the eternal essence.

So Shri Krishna asks us to to forcibly uplift our mind by the intellect. How do we do this? Whenever we have the urge to indulge in a sense pleasure, we give focus to our intellect. The intellect will then guide us in the right direction. We have to do this repeatedly and train the mind to go in the right direction.

However, we have to train our mind in the right manner. If we treat it forcefully it will rebel. The mind has got its own tricks, so we should

uddharet : uplift
aatmanaa : by yourself
aatmaanam : yourself
na : do not let
aatmaanam : yourself
avasaadayet : deprecate
aatmaa : you
eva : only
hi : for
aatmanaha : your
bandhuhu : friend
aatmaa : you
eva : only
ripuhu : enemy
aatmanaha : your

control it by becoming friends with it. All of our saadhanaas, our efforts, should be done intelligently, slowly and steadily. Only then does the journey become easy.

Furthermore, we also have to ensure that we do not fall any further, even if we are not able to raise the level of our mind. When climbing a mountain, mountaineers hammer nails into the rock and secure themselves with rope. This protects the mountaineers against falling down in case they slip. Similarly, when we look back at this stage a few years from now, we should see spiritual progress, not further degradation in our life.

Now, this is a tough task. Who will help us? Shri Krishna says that you yourself are your friend, you only can help yourself. When we are hungry, it does not help us if someone else eats our food. Similarly, our upliftment is in our own hands. If we can prevent ourselves from falling prey to the lower self, our higher self becomes our best friend. For instance, if we are reading the Gita and the mind gets distracted, we should bring our higher self into the picture. But if our minds continually succumb to the lower self, it becomes our worst enemy.

Therefore, Shri Krishna urges us to gently but firmly bring our mind into control, and orient it towards the intellect and our higher self.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 6, Chapter 6

*banduraatmaatmanastasya yenaatmaivaatmanaa jitaha |
anaatmanastu shatrutve vartetaatmaiva shatruvat || 6 ||*

For one who has conquered oneself by oneself, only his own self is his friend. But for one who has not conquered oneself, it is only his own self that behaves in animosity, like an enemy.

As further elaboration on the previous shloka, Shri Krishna explains exactly what he means by the statement "we are our own friend and we are our own enemy". He says that for the person that has used his intellect to conquer the mind and senses, he becomes his own friend. But for one who is unable to conquer the mind and senses, he becomes his own enemy. Note the repeated use of the word "aatmaa" or self in this shloka and the prior shloka to mean different things.

Now, what exactly is a "shatru" or enemy? It is someone who constantly creates trouble for us - a trouble maker. The mind, if not under our control, can be the world's most creative and impactful trouble maker. We tend to think it is our boss, our mother-in-law, our neighbour and so on to be our enemy, the troublemaker. But nothing beats that mind when it comes to creating problems for us.

Consider an example. Let's say the doctor has told us that sweets are bad for us. Now, imagine that we are at a social gathering and someone offers us a sweet. The intellect instantly knows what is the right thing to do. But the mind is different from the intellect. If the mind is not under control, it will say "go ahead, there is no harm in taking one piece of the sweet".

At this point, we fall prey to the lower self and eat the sweet. The mind now says, "this is a very tasty sweet. I think I will have this again tomorrow, first thing in the morning". Again we succumb to the lower self on the next day and eat the sweet again. Now, having eaten the sweet twice, the mind says "why did I eat this sweet twice? The doctor had said that it is bad for me. I hope this does not impact my health. I absolutely hate myself".

Here is someone who caused us trouble three times - before, during and after eating the sweet. But it was not someone from the outside. It was something within - our own mind. This is why Shri Krishna

banduhu : is a friend
aatmaa : oneself
aatmanaa : by oneself
tasya : for him
yena : who has
aatmaa : oneself
eva : only
aatmanaa : oneself
jitaha : conquered
anaatmanaha : for one who has not
conquered oneself
tu : but
shatrutve : in a spirit of animosity
varteta : behaves
aatmaa : his own self
eva : only
shatruvat : like an enemy

calls the uncontrolled mind to be the worst enemy possible in regards to our growth. The sweet is a small example of how the uncontrolled mind creates trouble for us day in and day out. Through conditioning by the sense organs, it repeatedly reinforces our likes and dislikes without regard to what is rational.

So the message is clear: progress towards meditation is not possible unless we use karmayoga to bring our mind under control and eliminate as many desires as possible.

In the shlokas so far, Shri Krishna gave an introduction to the topic of meditation. In the rest of this chapter, he will cover all aspects of meditation including: what is meditation, what is the process, what do we have to do internally and externally, what are the obstacles and how do we remove them, and how does such an individual that is established in meditation live in this world, which is the topic he takes up next.

The world for us comprises three aspects: situations that we encounter, objects that we use, and people that we interact with. In the next three shlokas, Shri Krishna takes up each aspect and paints a picture of the meditator's attitude towards each of these aspects.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 6

*jitaatmanaha prashaantasya paramaatmaa samaahitaha |
sheetoshnasukhadukheshu tathaa maanaapamaanayoho || 7 ||*

jitaatmanaha : one who has conquered himself
prashaantasya : serene person
paramaatmaa : supreme self
samaahitaha : steadfast
sheeta : cold
ushna : heat
sukha : joy
dukheshu : in sorrow
tathaa : and
maana : praise
apamaanayoho : in insult

One who has conquered himself, that serene person is steadfast in the supreme self, in cold and heat, in joy and sorrow, in praise and insult.

In the following three shlokas, Shri Krishna paints a picture of one who has realized the eternal essence through meditation, specifically with his outlook towards situations, objects and people. In this shloka, Shri Krishna tackles the meditator's outlook towards situations. He says that the meditator who has won over his senses and mind, won over his lower nature, his mind remains well established in the eternal essence all the time. No matter what situation he finds himself in, his mind remains even calm and peaceful - "prashaantaha".

Now, what does it mean to remain same in all situations? Let us take each aspect of the shloka one by one. Remaining same in cold and heat refers to pleasant and unpleasant situations experienced at the physical body level. Joy and sorrow and experienced as emotions at the mind level. Praise and insult are experienced either as boosters or blows to the ego. They are experienced at the intellect level. The body, mind and intellect are part of nature or prakriti. They react to situational changes, which also happen in prakriti.

We have been conditioned to respond to some situations favourably and some situations unfavourably. Our normal response to an unfavourable situation is to impose our will upon it, to change it. But in most cases, it never works. It is like the story of the king wanting to put a carpet on top of his entire kingdom's land, rather than wear a pair of slippers.

Moreover, two people respond to the same situation differently. A child may not take a scolding from his parents as an insult, because his ego is not fully developed yet. But a teenager will, because his ego is especially sensitive towards insults from his parents.

So therefore, one who knows that situations can only impact the body, mind and intellect, but not his self, he remains peaceful in all situations. If something good or bad happens to a person whom we

have no connection with, do we feel any joy or sorrow? We do not. That is the kind of understanding a realized meditator has towards his own body, mind and intellect. He does not feel the need to enter the realm of prakriti to change anything. He remains a witness of all these changes.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 6

*jnaanavignyaanatriptaatmaa kutastho vijitendriyaha |
yukta ityuchyate yogi samaloshtaashmakaaanchanaha || 6 ||*

One whose self is content with knowledge and wisdom, who is steady like an anvil, who has conquered the senses; such a person called an established yogi; to him, a lump of clay, a stone and gold are same.

jnaana : knowledge
vignyaana : wisdom
triptaatmaa : one whose self is content
vijitendriyaha : who has conquered the senses
yuktaha : established
iti : such a
uchyate : is called
yogi : yogi
sama : same
loshta : lump of mud
ashma : stone
kaanchanaha : gold

Shri Krishna continues the explanation on the outlook of a realized meditator. In this shloka, he speaks about how such a person responds to objects. This person's nature is complete and content with knowledge and wisdom, he has no need for anything else. This contentment and the mastery over senses gives him the quality of steadfastness. He is like an anvil in that regard. He sees sameness in a lump of clay, a stone and gold, such is his vision.

First let us look at what is meant by knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is that which is gained externally through study of texts. But wisdom comes only when this knowledge has been internalized, and when we can see its application in our life. If someone tells us that exercise is good, then it is knowledge. But if we also come to that conclusion and start exercising, it becomes wisdom. It is like a math problem, we have to work out the answer for ourselves.

Similarly, when we hear that our self is beyond the body, mind and intellect, it is knowledge. But if our body gets a disease, but we think that "I have fallen sick, not my body", it means that our knowledge has not translated into wisdom. Once I gain wisdom, I do not get disturbed by any more diseases. The combination of knowledge and wisdom brings me to the realization that I am complete, and hence I do not get affected by what happens to the body.

Next, Shri Krishna says that this person is steady like an anvil. A favourable object does not cause excitement in him, and an unfavourable object does not cause any agitation in him. Is it because he has become like a stone? No, it is because he is content with himself. He does not need to rush out into the world of objects to fulfill himself. He knows that desire and hatred are components of sense organs, as we saw in earlier chapters. So when he knows that desire and hatred is not his, and the reactions is not his, then he remains undisturbed.

Shri Krishna then mentions that such a person has full control over mind and senses. This point repeated countless times because it is the most important thing to do for a seeker, but also the most difficult. Even if we hear it several times it does not sink in. So, such a person becomes steady like an anvil because he remains absolutely steady in his own self. He completely controls his senses, they do not move without permission. There is no restlessness in the body.

What is the vision of this person towards object? He sees sameness in gold, clay and stone. Now he is not foolish. He knows that each of these has value in life, but he does not give them undue importance. He has a rational and practical assessment of each object's value in the grand scheme of things, but does not super-impose his values on them. These objects fail to attract and excite his mind.

So therefore, such a person is "yuktaha" or completely established in meditation. He has nothing further to do when it comes to meditation.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 9, Chapter 6

*suhrinmitraaryudaaseenamadhyasthadveshyabandhushu |
saadhushvapi cha paapeshu samabuddhivishishyate || 9 ||*

Well-wishers, friends, enemies, the unbiased, mediators, irritators, relatives, and also saints and sinners; one who views these as same is superior.

suhrida : well-wisher
mitra : friend
ari : enemy
udaaseena : unbiased
madhyastha : mediator
dveshya : irritators
bandhushu : relative
saadhushu : saint
api : also
cha : and
paapeshu : sinner
samabuddhihi : same vision
vishishyate : superior

In this shloka, the last shloka within the series of shlokas about the realized meditator's vision, Shri Krishna speaks about how such a person views people. He says that regardless of how other people are connected to this person - they could be friends, enemies and so on - he views them as alike. Now, having this kind of attitude towards people is far difficult than maintaining such an attitude with objects and situations. So for that reason, Shri Krishna calls such a person "superior".

There is diversity of individuals in this world, most of whom we do not deal with, but some of whom we do. By themselves, they are perfectly fine. But when we transact with them, we tend to categorize them through the lens of roles. A wide variety of such roles are provided here by Shri Krishna.

A "suhrida" is well wisher who does not expect anything in return from us, but is intent on doing actions that benefit us. Such people are rare. They do not keep a mental account of the good deeds that they have done, so that we can one day pay them back.

A "mitra" is friend, someone who cares for us. If we call him at midnight and ask for help, he will be there to help us. There is no doubt in our minds about whether or not he will help us. Consequently, we have raaga or desire towards that person.

An "ari" is our enemy. For reasons that are justified or even unjustified, we think that such a person wants to trouble us without any reason. We have dvesha or hatred towards this person. This becomes especially troublesome in meditation, because what we hate will come out as thoughts that disturb us in our meditation, not what we love.

"Udaaseena" literally means one who has lifted himself higher. He is indifferent and unbiased towards us and others. We have a neutral

attitude towards such a person.

A "madhyastha" is a mediator. If there are two sets of people, he cares for both parties that could either have something in common, or are even opposed to each other. Such people are known to arrange weddings between two families, or even resolve disputes.

A "dveshya" is a person who we cannot stand. It is not necessary that such a person is our enemy or wishes ill of us. It is someone who irritates us for no reason. Either we want to pick a fight with us, or we want to pick a fight with them.

A "bandhu" is a relative. It is someone who, whether we like it or not, has a relationship with us due to a familial tie. In fact this word is derived from the word "bandhan" which means tie or knot.

A saadhu is a totally pious and noble person whom we have utmost respect for. The opposite of such a person is a "paapi" or a sinner, one who has committed great crime.

So therefore, Shri Krishna says that the person whose mental state remains same whenever he thinks of or encounters any of these types of people, he is superior. But to get to this stage first requires a more basic level of sameness when we perform actions. That can only be achieved through karma yoga. Unless the mind is steady while performing actions, we cannot rise to the level of sameness mentioned in this shloka. Our thinking has to change from the ground up.

How does our thinking have to change? Our outlook towards people is usually in terms of gains and losses. We tend to evaluate people by the notion "what can they do for me?". But one who has truly understood law of karma will know that whatever is happening in their life is nothing but a product of their actions. Another way of looking at people is "why does not he or she behave like I want?" But that is like asking "why is fire hot" or "why is salt salty". People have in-built behaviour that is hard to change.

So, when someone upgrades himself to the karmayoga vision and submits all actions to Ishvara, he leaves all results to Ishvara also. He then begins to view the workings of world as Ishvara's plan. Regardless of whether he encounters a good or bad situation, person or object, he will say "this is Ishvara's plan" or "this is nature working through its laws".

Once he has taken himself out of the picture, there no need to hold grudge against any one person, no room for complaint. It makes us become unperturbed and gradually, free of any worries caused by the world. This is how we develop the vision of sameness towards people.

So here, Shri Krishna concludes the topic of the realized meditator's vision of the world. Next, he introduces the main topic of meditation.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 6

*yogi yunjeeta satatamaatmaanam rahasi sthitaha |
ekaakee yatachittaatamaa niraasheeraparigraha || 10 ||*

yogi : yogi
yunjeeta : should engage
satatam : constantly
aatmaanam : in his self
rahasi : in a solitary place
sthitaha : established
ekaakee : alone
yatachittaatamaa : subdued his mind and
body
niraasheehi : without expectations
aparigraha : giving up all possessions

The yogi should constantly engage in his self, establish himself alone in a solitary place, having subdued his mind and body, without expectations, giving up all possessions.

Shri Krishna gives us an introduction to the topic of meditation in this shloka. He says that the main goal of meditation is to absorb our mind into our self or atmaa. It is not something that we "do", but it is a state that we aspire for, just like we do not "do" sleep. We achieve this state by gaining control over the mind and the body and by dropping off all worldly identifications and expectations. One who practices meditation in such a manner is called a dhyana yogi.

First, Shri Krishna speaks about the preparation for meditation. He says that that we should sit in a solitary place and should constantly tried to quieten the mind. Why the need for solitary place? Meditation is not a group activity, but ultimately it is an individual activity that is for the yogi alone. It has nothing to do with what other person is doing. Also, it means that we should not depend on anything or anyone for meditation. Some people think that meditation needs a special mat, furniture, tea etc. No external aids are needed.

Furthermore, the solitary place chosen for meditation has to be free from all distraction. It should not occur in a place where there is too much noise. Just like we choose a quiet place when we want to sleep, so too should be the place for meditation. The time we choose for meditation has to be conducive as well. It should not create inconvenience to anyone. If other family members are dependent on you at some time, that is not the right time for meditation.

The notion of "ekaaki" or solitude has another aspect. When we sit for meditation, we should drop all other roles and relationships that we identify with such as father, daughter, wife, boss, employee and so on. Otherwise thoughts of family, employees, meetings and so on will pop up during meditation. At least for that period of meditation, we should assume the role of a renunciate or sannyasi. Usually, meditation is one of the few times in the day when we are not "doing" anything. If we are not careful, we will worry about things that we

normally do not have time to worry about during meditation. So Shri Krishna asks us to be mindful of this.

"Yatachittaatamaa" means that the yogi thoroughly has controlled his mind and body through continuous practice of karma yoga. As we saw earlier, Shri Krishna stresses sense control in almost every chapter in the Gita so far. It is probably the biggest qualification for meditation.

Another preparation for the meditator is the quality of "niraasheehi". It means that the meditator does not have any expectations from anything or anyone. Through his own direct observation and analysis of the material world, he has concluded that external things are not going to give him what he is looking for. He has developed the quality of "vairagya" or dispassion.

"Aparigraha" is the last quality mentioned in this shloka. Parigraha is storing or hoarding things, so therefore aparigraha means giving up all notions of "mine-ness", this is mine and so on. The meditator should drop all baggage, in other words he should be free of all thoughts of past and future. It also means that one must give up expectations of any gifts from other people.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 6

*shuchau deshe pratishthaapya sthiramaasanamaatmanaha |
naatyucchritam naatineecham chailaajinakushottaram || 11 ||*

shuchau : clean
deshe : place
pratishthaapya : establish
sthiram : stable
aasanam : seat
aatmanaha : your
na : not
ati : too
ucchritam : high
neecham : low
chaila : cloth
ajina : deerskin
kusha : grass
uttaram : thereafter

In a clean place, establish your stable seat that is not too high or low, with cloth, deerskin and grass.

Shri Krishna now describes the actual process of meditation. In this shloka, he talks about

how to sit down and where to sit down for meditation. He says that the seat of meditation should be in a clean and pure place, it should not be too high or too low, and should have sufficient insulation such as a cloth.

First let us look at what is meant by "shuchau deshe" or clean place. The seat of meditation should be placed in a clean and pure location. Some places are naturally clean and pure, and some can be cleaned through one's effort. Anything that distracts us from meditation becomes an obstacle. If something is dirty, or we are afraid that some insects are around, we cannot do meditation. Preferably, it should be a room or an area of the house where we do not have strong associations. If we meditate in the kitchen, out of habit we will start thinking about food and so on. Therefore, without a clean and pure place, meditation is not possible for beginners.

There is a subtle point made here that merits attention. Why should we sit for meditation? Why cannot we stand or sleep in meditation? Meditation requires the cultivation of saattvic tendencies. It is not possible in sleeping which is a tamasic posture, or in standing which is a raajasic posture. That is why we need to sit. Sitting in one place without doing anything itself becomes difficult for many of us. Hence, that should be our first step.

Next, let's look at the seat itself. Shri Krishna says that the height of the seat should not be too high so that we are scared of falling down, or too low that insects and other animals can bother us. It should be stable so that we are not distracted by the constant fear of falling down.

Finally, Shri Krishna asks us to put cloth, deer skin and kusha grass on the seat. What is meant here is that there should be a layer of insu-

lation between our body and the seat. The seat could be very cold or hot, which could again become a distraction to the mind.

Having prepared oneself in a seating posture, what should come next? Shri Krishna covers this point in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 6

*tatrekaagram manaha kritvaa yatachittendriyakriyaha |
upavishyaasane yunhyaadyogamaatmavishuddhaye || 12 ||*

Seated on that seat, making the mind single pointed, having subdued the activities of the mind and senses, engage in the yoga for purification of the self.

tatra : that
ekaagram : single-pointed
manaha : mind
kritvaa : making
yatachittendriyakriyaha : subduing
activities of mind and senses
upavishya : seated
asane : seat
yunhyaat : engage
yogam : yoga
aatma : self
vishuddhaye : purification

In this shloka, Shri Krishna provides a comprehensive introduction to the process of meditation, and also points out the goal of meditation. He says that the goal of meditation is to purify the intellect. The process to do that is by sitting down, controlling the mind and senses, and focusing the mind, making it single pointed.

First let us examine the goal of meditation which is the purification of the intellect. The shloka says "aatma-vishuddhaye" meaning "self-purification". Note that the word self means the intellect here. But what does purification of the intellect mean exactly? To understand that, we need to take a step back and examine where meditation is placed with respect to the topics in the Gita. Meditation is the culmination of the entire curriculum of the Gita which aims at removing the three main defects of our personality: mala, vikshepa and aavarana.

In the third chapter of the Gita, we encountered karmayoga. It enables us to purify the first impurity of the personality known as mala or dirt. Mala causes the mind to rush out into the world of sense objects due to a sense of finitude. In other words, it causes us to act in the world. As we have seen earlier, we use karmayoga to turn this defect against itself, just like a thorn removes another thorn. Next, devotion or bhakti is used to remove the second defect known as vikshepa, which is the tendency of the mind to get distracted. Chapters 7 to 12 examine bhakti in great detail.

After dealing with mala and vikshepa, the Gita addresses the last defect known as aavarana or covering. This covering prevents us from fully getting established in the knowledge of the eternal essence. Having gone through shravanam (reading and listening to knowledge) and mananam (removal of doubts), meditation helps us achieve the last step which is nidhidhyaasa or internalization of this knowledge.

So the notion that "I am not this body, I am the eternal essence" needs

to be fully internalized so that it becomes second nature to us. This is the goal of meditation.

The process to achieve this goal is also addressed in this shloka. Shri Krishna asks us to sit down on that seat that was described in the previous shloka. He then asks us to make the mind single-pointed or focused. But this is easier said than done. Whenever we close our eyes and sit in meditation, the thoughts of the world rush in.

Many techniques are given in other literature in order to make this happen, including concentrating attention on a point on the wall, on a flame and so on. But the prerequisite to all of this is that we have to subdue the mind and the senses.

Consider the example of the person that wants to remain seated inside a room. Either he will have thoughts of objects outside the room, or someone from the outside will want him to come out of the room. Similarly, when we sit for meditation, either the mind will generate thoughts of the world, or the sense organs will pick up a scent, a touch and so on that will drag the mind out. Therefore, we have to control the mind and senses before attempting meditation.

There also are some secondary benefits to meditation. If we meditate on a regular basis, we will never be reactive to situations. No matter what kind of situation comes up in front of us, we will always take time to pause and then decide. This is because the mind has already been trained to slow down the thinking process. We will then not lose our balance and not always work in a reactionary mode. We will take a good look at situation and slowly approach it

meditative person will have this advantage.

Next, Shri Krishna delves into the specifics of meditation.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 6

*samam kaayashirogreevam dhaarayannachalam sthiraha |
samprekshya naasikaagram svam dishashchaanavalokayan || 13 ||*

samam : straight
kaaya : trunk
shiraha : head
greevam : neck
dhaarayan : holding
achalam : firm
sthiraha : steady
samprekshya : observing
naasikaagram : point of the nose
svam : your
dishaha : all directions
cha : and
anavalokayan : not looking

Holding the trunk, head and neck firm and steady, observing the tip of one's nose, and not looking around.

Shri Krishna describes the method of achieving the perfect posture of meditation in this shloka. He says that the best posture for meditation is one where the trunk, head and neck are perfectly aligned. Then the focus of attention should be brought to one point in the body. The focus should not be allowed to wander.

Meditation is an inward journey into the self. The means to this journey is to slowly quieten and negate everything else but the self. The first component of the "not-self" that we have to quieten is our body. So therefore, Shri Krishna tells us to keep our body absolutely firm and steady. Good posture is the best way to achieve this firmness. In this regard, he advises us to align the head, neck and trunk of the body.

For most of us, sitting still in one place and in one posture for even 10-15 minutes is a challenge in itself. Our willpower gets tested. Therefore this is where we should begin. Once we can sit still for 10-15 minutes, we should gradually increase the time to at least 25-30 minutes. If we do nothing else but manage to sit still for 30 minutes, that in itself is a wonderful preparatory step to meditation. The mind will vehemently resist this, but just as we gently but firmly command a child to do their homework, so must we command the mind.

Having brought the body under control, we should then practice focusing our attention so that the mind can be made single-pointed. Shri Krishna says that we should observe the point of our nose and keep our attention there. What is meant here is that we should lock our eyes on a single point. When we sit in one place, our mind either rushes into past memories, or creates future scenarios. Consequently, our eyes follow the mind and start moving. So therefore, we should focus our eyes on one point so that our attention becomes focused as well.

Breath regulation is an important part of any meditative practice. Controlling the breath directly is an effective technique for focusing the

mind, but it needs to be learned from a master otherwise it could prove dangerous. Shri Krishna suggests that we subdue our mind and thoughts instead. Since the mind and the breath are connected, the breath automatically will be regulated if the mind is controlled.

So far, Shri Krishna has covered the quietening of the body and breath. Next, he covers the object that is to be meditated upon.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 6

prashaantaatmaa vigatabheerbrahmachaarivrate sthitaha |
manaha saiyamya macchitto yukta aaseeta matparaha || 14 ||

One whose personality is calm, fearless and established in the vow of renunciation, with a restrained mind, the seeker should sit with his mind focused on me, regarding me as supreme.

prashaantaatmaa : calm personality
 vigatabheehi : fearless
 brahmachaarivrate : vow of renunciation
 sthitaha : established in
 manaha : mind
 saiyamya : under restraint
 macchittaha : mind focused on me
 yuktaha : the seeker
 aaseeta : should sit
 matparaha : regarding me as supreme

This shloka continues the topic of the method of meditation. Once we have made all the physical preparations and are ready to begin meditation, the question comes up: what do we meditate upon? What should be the object of our meditation? Shri Krishna has a simple answer. He says - meditate upon me. He asks us for two things: to focus our mind on him, and to regard him as the highest goal to be attained.

For beginning seekers, the notion of meditating upon the abstract aatmaa or self is difficult. To that end, he asks the seeker to choose any one form of Ishvara that the seeker takes delight in. Unless the seeker learns to take delight in one form of Ishvara, he will need a lot of effort to focus his mind on Ishvara. The seeker needs to put effort in making Ishvara his goal. This is why Shri Krishna repeatedly urges us to detach from sense pleasure and attach ourselves to something higher. Otherwise, if we love food for example, we will begin to meditate on food since it will be the first thing that pops into our mind when meditating.

What are the other prerequisites of a meditator? His personality or aatmaa is prashaanta. In other words, he is a calm, quiet and deep person. Only when the seeker's mind becomes extremely quiet is meditation possible. In fact, if the mind is disturbed, even worldly things such as studying for an exam cannot be accomplished. Even though the mind is not quiet throughout the day, the meditator should take care that the mind is quiet at least during meditation time. It will take 10 minutes or so for the mind to calm all its thoughts, hence the meditator should plan on sitting for at least 15-20 minutes.

The next prerequisite is that the meditator should be vigatabheehi which means fearless, one from whom fear has completely gone away. The biggest fear that the meditator harbours is that he will lose his worldly identity, that he will drop his worldly life. That is why the meditator has to have prepared himself, following the instructions

given so far, to give up his individuality. Another way of looking at this is that we fear of duality. We are scared to think that we are separate from other people, objects and situations. But one who has learned to see the sameness in everyone has eliminated this fear, because he sees his self in everyone.

Another prerequisite is that the meditator should be established with the vow of renunciation. Colloquially, the word brahmachari means celibate. Here it means one who casts off all roles and dons the role of a seeker when he sits for meditation. He has no other pursuits in mind, no other roles in mind. He is not someone's boss, employee, son, husband, brother and so on. If he associates with any of these roles, thoughts associated with that role will enter his mind during meditation. The only role to be assumed is that of a saadhaka or a seeker.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 6

*yunjannevam sadaatmaanam yogi niyatamaanasaha |
shaantim nirvaanaparamaam matsamsthaamadhigacchati || 15 ||*

In this manner, the yogi who has subdued his mind, who always engages his self in me, attains ultimate liberation-bearing peace, established in me.

yunjan : engaged
evam : in this manner
sadaa : always
aatmaanam : self
yogi : yogi
niyatamaanasaha : one who has controlled his mind
shaantim : peace that leads to
nirvaanaparamaam : ultimate liberation-bearing
matsamsthaam : established in me
adhigacchati : attains

Previously, Shri Krishna explained the prerequisites and the method of meditation. Now, he speaks about the result or the fruit of meditation. He says that meditation, if followed as the technique prescribed here, brings us that peace that yields self-realization.

The journey towards this end goal obviously will take a long time. But there are intermediate results along the way. One who begins to drop attachment and fascination for material objects attains a state of ever-increasing peace. However, this peace does not lead to liberation. It is not "nirvaana paramam".

Only peace gained by meditating upon the self leads to liberation. Initially, the sense of peace is only present while meditating, but slowly remains with the seeker for longer periods of time. Till the final stage is reached, the person may falter in his journey. Once the final stage is reached, he will never turn back.

Now, what is the source of this peace? Shri Krishna says that it is he who is the source of this peace. One of the fundamental lessons of the Gita is that only the eternal essence can give everlasting bliss and peace. Everything else gives temporary peace. Therefore, Shri Krishna urges the seeker to comprehend this fact and stop going after objects in the material world for happiness and peace.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 6

*naatyashnatastu yogosti na chaikaantamanashnataha |
na chaati svapnasheelasya jaagrito naiva chaarjuna || 16 ||*

This yoga is not for one who overeats nor for one who fasts, it is not for one who oversleeps nor for one who never sleeps, O Arjuna.

When we begin to think that we are progressing in meditation, we may begin to impose severe hardships on the body just because we have seen some others do it. Shri Krishna, in this shloka and the next one, dispels many of these misconceptions. Alternately, we may go in the other direction and begin to neglect the body. In this regard, he advocates a balanced and moderate lifestyle towards achieving our spiritual goals.

First let us examine the imposition of severe hardships on the body. Shri Krishna says that meditation will not be easy for one who constantly deprives his body of food and sleep. If the body is deprived of food for a long period of time, where will the mind go when we sit in meditation? It will go to food. The same thing will happen if we forcibly deprive the body of sleep. The minute we close our eyes to meditate, sleep will take over the body. Such hardships become obstacles in meditation.

Before the Buddha achieved enlightenment, he went through a phase where he deprived his body of food. When his body began to look like a skeleton, and when he realized that he was almost about to die of starvation, he came to the conclusion that such severe hardships do not in any way accelerate the process of enlightenment. One cannot torture the very instrument that one uses to attain liberation. Like a perfectly tuned musical instrument, the strings should not be too loose or too tightly wound.

The other extreme is living life improperly by overeating and oversleeping. Besides the health problems associated with overeating, the additional strain put on the digestive system will draw the mind's attention away from meditation. Where meditation aims to negate association with the body, overeating pulls the meditator back to the body. Also, oversleeping makes the body dull and taamasic. Instead of meditation uplifting the meditator to a higher level of sattva, oversleeping will also pull the meditator down.

na : not
ati : extreme
ashnaha : eating
tu : for
yogaha : this yoga
ati : extreme
na : not
cha : and
ekaantam : ever
anashnataha : fasting
na : not
cha : and
ati : extreme
svapnasheelasya : sleeper
jaagritaha : waker
na : not
eva : only
cha : and
arjuna : O Arjuna

So therefore, any deviation from treating the body with care and moderation is not just an obstacle in the spiritual path, it also is an obstacle in any worldly activities. Shri Shankaraachaarya provides a simple formula for moderating our eating habits. He says that one should have a sense of how big one's appetite is, and then divide it into four parts. Two parts of that appetite should be filled with solid food, one part with liquid and one part should be left empty.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 6

yuktaahaaravihaarasya yuktacheshtasya karmasu |
yuktasvapnaavabodhasya yogo bhavati duhkhaaha || 17 ||

One who has regulated his intake and movements, his conduct in action, his sleep and wakefulness, his sorrows are eliminated through yoga.

yukta : regulated
aahaara : intake
vihaara : movement
asya : one who conducts
yuktacheshtasya : one who is well behaved
karmasu : in actions
yukta : regulated
svapna : sleep
avabodhasya : one who is awake
yogaha : yoga
bhavati : are
duhkha : sorrow
haa : eliminate

In several places within the Gita, Shri Krishna explains a point by highlighting both its positive and negative aspects. Previously, he advised the seeker against pursuing extensive austerities using the body. In this shloka, he urges us to lead a well balanced and regulated life so that our body can support our spiritual endeavours. He says that one who has a well regulated diet, exercise, conduct and sleep is fit to become a meditator. Meditation destroys sorrow when one leads a regulated life, but it can very well cause sorrow if one does not.

As we saw earlier, Shri Krishna advises us to monitor the quantity and quality of our food intake. We should be constantly aware of what we are eating, how often we are eating it, what will be the impact on our meditation and so on. On similar lines, the level of daily activity conducted by our body should be appropriate with regards to our health, job and so on. If we lead mostly sedentary lives, then we should undertake the right level of exercise so that meditation does not make the body less active. If we lead very active lives, then we need to ensure that our body is calm and rested when we attempt to meditate.

Furthermore, the quality of our actions also determines success in meditation. If we have the habit of getting into fights with people, we will not be able to meditate properly because the fight will pop up during meditation. Similarly, if we watch a lot of tv or read a lot just before meditation, those inputs will manifest as thoughts and disrupt the meditation. The need to have the appropriate amount of sleep is also re-emphasized.

Broadly speaking, we have to decide what takes priority in our life. If material pursuits take priority, then there always will be excuses and reasons why our meditation cannot happen properly. But if meditation becomes the primary priority, then not only will we progress on the spiritual path, but the well-regulated life that results out of the discipline the we gain becomes a welcome addition.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 6

*yada viniyatam chittamaatmanyevaavatishyate |
nihspruhaha sarvakaamebhyo yukta ityuchyate tadaa || 18 ||*

yada : when
viniyatam : controlled
chittam : mind
aatmani : in the self
eva : only
avatishyate : is established
nihspruhaha : indifferent towards
sarvakaamebhyo : all objects
yuktaha : that yogi
iti : in this manner
uchyate : is called
tadaa : at that time

When the controlled mind, indifferent towards all objects, is established only in the self, then such a person is called a yogi.

In this key shloka within the sixth chapter, Shri Krishna gives us a way to evaluate ourselves with regards to attaining perfection in meditation. He says that only when one can establish the mind in the self, and not in material objects of the world, is one fit to be called a meditator. There is a lot of depth and meaning in this shloka. The next few shlokas go deeper into its meaning.

For most of us, it is the thoughts about the material world that become the major obstacle in meditation. These thoughts are generated by vaasanaas, which are latent desires and cravings. When we experience or entertain materials object in the mind, we create subtle impressions or vaasanaas in our mind, like a camera, that "this object/person/situation is good". The mind then regurgitates these impressions in the form of thoughts. The part of the mind that stores these impressions is also known as the "chitta".

A desire is a thought that says "I have not experienced something, I want to experience it". A craving is a thought that says "I already had a good experience, but I want it to experience it again". It is these 2 types of thoughts that do not allow us to sit down in meditation, because they take the mind outward. Depending on the proclivities of our sense organs, impressions are recorded deeply or superficially. Stronger impressions generate stronger thoughts, pulling the mind outward forcefully.

Shri Krishna says that when the mind has gone beyond generating desires and cravings, only then does proper meditation happen. When the mind gets established in the self, at that time, this person is considered as perfected, integrated and established in meditation. He is fit to be called a yogi. It will only happen with a very well firmly controlled mind, which is pure and free from all kinds of cravings and desires.

Next, let us examine the question of where should the mind be established once it has stopped turning outward. Shri Krishna says that

the mind should get established in the *aatmaa* or the self. But, in an earlier shloka, he had asked us to meditate on his form. What does this mean?

Shri Krishna says that there is no difference. He is our self. In fact, he is the self of all beings. This is the great revelation of the scriptures. If we choose to meditate on his form, that is fine. If we choose to meditate on the formless *brahman*, the eternal essence, that is fine too. It is usually easier to meditate on the form for beginner seekers. But it is extremely important that we have extreme regard and love towards the *Ishta Devata*, the form of *Ishvara* that we chose to meditate on. It could be *Vitthala*, *Rama*, *Krishna* - any deity. Meditation is not a mechanical activity, it needs uncompromising support from the body, mind and intellect. If the mind does not take pleasure in meditation, it will not happen.

Furthermore, the mind will settle in the self only when we make meditation our top priority. In other words, all other activities in the world should take lower priority. Otherwise, they will show up in meditation. Our job is to do just that. The mind will settle in the self automatically once we do so. It is like a youngster in the house trying to study for an exam while the TV, internet and music system are on. His attention will never go to studying because it is being dragged in several directions. He needs to first switch all the other things off.

Next, Shri Krishna explains the state of a perfect meditator through an illustration.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 6

*yathaa deepo nivaatasthato nengate sopamaa smritaa |
yogino yatachittasya yunjato yogamaatmanaha || 19 ||*

Just like a lamp in a windless place does not flicker, this state is comparable to the yogi, having controlled the mind, who engages his self in yoga.

yathaa : just like
deepaha : lamp
nivaatasthataha : in a windless place
na : does not
ingate : flicker
upamaa : comparison
smritaa : has been said
yoginaha : of the yogi
yatachittasya : who has controlled the mind
yunjato : engages
yogam : yoga
aatmanaha : with his self

The state of the meditator's mind is beautifully explained with a classic illustration or "upamaa" by Shri Krishna in this shloka. He compares the mind of a meditator to the flame of a lamp that is burning in a windless room. Just like the flame is unwavering due to absence of wind, so too is the mind of a meditator steady due to absence of desire.

If we compare the focused mind to a steady flame, then we need to understand how to prevent the mind from succumbing to the winds of desire. If desires exist, we may be able to temporarily stabilize the mind, but it will eventually get destabilized due to a thought generated by a desire. Presence of desire indicates absence of detachment or vairagya. The only cure is to increase our level of detachment towards the world.

The intense level of detachment that is needed for meditation is not an alien concept. When people get extremely absorbed in watching TV, they temporarily develop detachment towards everything else. If we call them for dinner, or if the doorbell rings and so on, these external occurrences do not even register in their minds. It again depends on what we give importance to.

Now let us examine another aspect of the lamp illustration. According to Vedaanta, seeing an inert object is a 2 step process. First, our mind creates a mental picture of the object. Next, the atman or self shines a light on that picture, just like a torch does. Only when this light is shined do we come to know that "this is a mango" or "this is a car" and so on.

But when we meditate on the self, the second step does not happen because we are not focusing our attention on an inert object. We are focusing on the self, which illuminates itself. It is like shining a torch on the sun - the torch is useless. The self is like the candle since it does not require anything else to illumine it, to shine a light on it. This is

another point made in the illustration of the flame.

So therefore, when our focus and concentration reaches its peak, and when the target of meditation becomes our own *aatmaa* or self, it is the culmination of meditation. It is the state of *samaadhi*. This state is further elaborated upon in the forthcoming *shlokas*.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 6

yatroparamate chittam niruddham yogasevayaa |
yatra chaivaatmaanaatmaanam pashyannaatmani tushyati || 20 ||

yatra : when
 uparamate : quietened
 chittam : mind
 niruddham : removal
 yogasevayaa : by engaging in yoga
 yatra : when
 cha : and
 eva : only
 atmaanaa : in the self
 atmaanam : the self
 pashyan : beholds
 atmani : in the self
 tushyati : content

When the mind is quietened through restraint by engaging in yoga, and when, beholding the self in the self, the self is content.

Shri Krishna further elaborates on the state of the perfected meditator in this shloka. He says that the perfected meditator severs all connections of his mind with material objects, and established a connection to the self or atmaa during meditation. When the connections with the material objects are severed, he achieves a level of satisfaction never achieved with material objects. The big difference here is that the satisfaction is from within, not from without.

Imagine a 100 watt bulb that is connected to a generator. The generator cannot produce more than 10 watts. Moreover, the generator is defective so even the 10 watts that it produces is intermittent. The bulb will be temporarily satisfied, but will never achieve complete satisfaction. Now, imagine that the bulb finds out that it was inside a power plant all along. When it disconnects itself from the faulty generator, and connects itself to the power plant, it will immediately experience unlimited power. Moreover, this power will be consistent and long-lasting.

Similarly, Shri Krishna says that the satisfaction that our mind achieves from the material world is limited and temporary. The only way to gain unlimited and permanent happiness is to connect our mind to the self or atmaa. But this happens only when we first disconnect the mind from material objects. The state of the mind when it has disconnected from material objects, and is ready to settle into the self, is called uparamate in the shloka.

Withdrawal from the material world is not easy. It is the outcome of following a disciplined spiritual curriculum. First, we have to develop discrimination or viveka by strengthening our intellect through reading and listening about the eternal essence through scriptures. This enables us to develop dispassion or vairagya towards the material world. Dispassion starts turning the mind away from material objects, leading to withdrawal from the material world. It is like our attitude towards toys versus a child's attitude - we have dispassion, the child does not.

So therefore, when the mind has fully turned inward, and has settled into the aatmaa or the self, we experience a deep and lasting level of satisfaction and bliss. But what exactly is meant by the mind settling into the self? It is when the only thought that remains is that "I am the aatmaa" or "I am the eternal essence". All other thoughts about the world, people, objects, situations and so on have gone away.

Having gained this everlasting bliss and satisfaction, what does the meditator do? Shri Krishna explains this next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 21, Chapter 6

*sukhamaatyantikam yattadbuddhigraahyamateendriyam |
vetti yatra na chaivaayam sthitashchalati tattvataha || 21 ||*

That infinite joy which is comprehended by the intellect but is beyond the senses, when he experiences that state and is established in it, he does not move away from his essence.

Previously, Shri Krishna explained that the perfected meditator taps into a source of permanent joy once he detaches the mind from the sense organs and connects it to his self. In this shloka, he elaborates on the nature of that joy. He says that this joy is infinite and is comprehended only by the intellect. Also, he says that once we are established in this joy, no external circumstance will knock us or take us away from this state.

Let us examine the nature of this joy. Shri Krishna says that it is aatyantikam or infinite. Now, the material world is an expert in giving us infinite sorrow. There are moments in our life when the degree of sorrow is low, and we tend to think that this is joy whereas in reality it is just a lower grade of sorrow. Any new object, person or situation that we encounter carries within it the seed for innumerable sorrows. But the joy that one gets from the self is infinite.

Why is the joy from the self infinite? All our worldly joys are dependent on external situations. For some of us, a perfect climate makes us happy, causing us to become sad if the climate changes. For some of us, a certain person makes us happy, so we become dependent on that person and consequently feel sad if that person leaves us. We keep creating subsets in the world: I like A, which means I don't everything that is not A. But here's the problem; A is finite and temporary. The joy experienced in the self is independent of all external situations that are temporary in nature. That is why it is infinite.

Another characteristic of this joy is that it is beyond the comprehension of the senses. Just like we cannot catch a satellite TV signal with a regular antenna, our senses cannot catch this joy. It is of a different wavelength altogether. It is only comprehended by our intellect, which operates at a much higher level than our mind and senses.

As an example, consider two teenagers who are at a party where ev-

sukham : joy
aatyantikam : infinite
yat : that
tat : that
buddhigraahyam : comprehended by
the intellect
ateendriyam : beyond the senses
vetti : experiences
yatra : in that state
na : does not
cha : and
eva : ever
ayam : he
sthitaha : established
chalati : move away
tattvataha : in his essence

everyone else is enjoying a cigarette. Both of them are offered a cigarette by their friends. The sense organs are reporting the same information to both the teenager's intellects - that cigarette smoking is enjoyable and that all their friends are doing it. One teenager accepts the offer and takes a puff. But the other teenager has a refined intellect and it "sees" that this will only lead to sorrow in the end. In the same way, the intellect experiences joy that the senses cannot experience.

Shri Krishna further goes on to say that once the perfected meditator is established in this joy, he will never deviate from it. It is like a child learning that $2+2 = 4$. Once he has internalized this teaching, it stays with him throughout his life. Similarly, once the perfected meditator realizes this self as his true nature, he will not feel the need to take on any other role or identification for the purpose of fulfillment.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 22, Chapter 6

*yam labdhvaa chaaparam laabham manyate naadhikam tataha |
yasminsthitho na duhkkena gurunaapi vichaalyate || 22 ||*

yam : that
labdhvaa : having obtained
cha : and
aparam : no other
laabham : gain
manyate : consider
na : does not
adhikam : superior
tataha : than that
yasmin : in which
sthithaha : established
na : cannot be
duhkkena : from sorrow
gurunaa : heaviest
api : even
vichaalyate : agitated by

Having obtained this gain, he does consider anything superior than that, established in which he cannot be agitated by the heaviest of sorrows.

Elaborating further on the joy attained by the perfected meditator, Shri Krishna says that once the meditator gets this joy, he does not ascribe any importance to any other joy in the world. The joy of meditation becomes paramount. Also, this joy protects the meditator from the shocks of worldly life. Having gained the joy of meditation, he does not get agitated by any sorrow whatsoever.

As we saw earlier, any joy obtained in the material world is temporary. If someone becomes a manager, he aspires to become a senior manager. Once he becomes a senior manager, he experiences joy for some time, but then he aims for a so-called larger joy: he wants to become a director. And so the cycle continues.

We continually aim for greater and greater joys. In other words, we are always planning for future enjoyment. There will never come a point in life when we can say "yes, now my life is fulfilled". Shri Krishna says that only meditation will give sense of true fulfillment and everlasting joy, incomparable to any worldly joy that we have experienced. Any worldly joy will pale in comparison to this joy. When one wins a lottery that pays millions, one does not go seeking pennies.

Next, Shri Krishna says that the person who becomes established in this joy of meditation is shielded from the impact of the most troublesome sorrows. Now, attainment of the joy in meditation does not mean that magically, all our sorrows will vanish. Till our human body exists, joy and sorrow will exist as well. But meditation will give us an armour that will protect us from all worldly sorrows. The inner strength provided by meditation will make us "shock proof".

Let us imagine that we hear extremely disturbing news. What is our reaction typically? Our mind generates thoughts at a breakneck speed. If the sorrow is about a loss of a person, the storehouse of the mind (chitta) generates anxiety-ridden thoughts about the future (what will I

do now, how will I survive, how will I adapt etc), memories of the past (it was so nice back in the day when I knew this person), and regrets (I should have done this). These are just a sample of the thousands of thoughts that the mind generates when learning of a disturbing event. For most of us, these thoughts destabilize us. But the meditator's mind has become "set" in the eternal essence, it never loses its stability.

However, we have to be careful before we give so much credit to the practice of meditation. Plain meditation without understanding, in other words, meditation without learning the content of the Gita thus far, does not give us this result. But if our intellect has diligently studied about the eternal essence - that it is beyond birth and death, that it is changeless, that it cannot be destroyed and so on - and our mind has become established in the eternal essence through meditation, the multitude of thoughts that hit our mind fail to destabilize us. We become like a rock that remains steady in a storm, not the tree that gets uprooted.

So therefore, meditation gives us the best of both worlds. It gives us joy independent of any future sorrow, and also protects us from the impact of heavy sorrows. In the next shloka, Shri Krishna concludes the sub-topic of the joy of meditation

Bhagavad Gita Verse 23, Chapter 6

tam vidyaadyuhkhasaiyogaviyogam yogasanngitam |
sa nischayena yuktavyo yagonirvinnachetasaa || 23 ||

You should know the definition of yoga as that which severs connection with sorrow. You should engage in yoga with firm conviction and a non-despondent mind.

tam : that which
 vidyaat : you should know
 duhkha : sorrow
 saiyoa : connection
 viyogam : sever
 yoga : yoga
 sanngitam : definition
 saha : that
 nischayena : firm conviction
 yuktavyaha : should engage in
 yogaha : yoga
 anirvinna : not despondent
 chetasaa : mind

Shri Krishna motivates and inspires the meditator to attain perfection in meditation in this shloka. Only through meditation can the meditator completely sever all sorrows. He urges the meditator to follow the path of meditation with a firm and unwavering determination. No obstacles should deter the meditator from his goal.

We are introduced to yet another definition of yoga in this shloka. In the second chapter we saw two definitions of yoga: yoga is equanimity, and yoga is dexterity in action. Here, yoga is defined as "duhkha saiyoa viyoga". Let us examine what this means.

Sorrow has an intimate relationship or connection with our live. We do get glimpses of happiness, but this is due to the degree of sorrow declining temporarily. This connection is termed as "dukhha saiyoa". We never lose this connection with sorrow throughout our life. Shri Krishna says that the yoga of meditation is the only means by which we can sever or separate this connection with sorrow. This is why the yoga is meditation is defined here as "duhkha saiyoa viyoga".

In other words, if we have perfected ourselves in meditation, sorrows can never touch us. Even though we cannot stop sorrows from approaching us, we will not associate with them ever again after meditation. This capability comes as a result of the fixity of mind developed through meditation. So in addition to progressing in our spiritual journey, meditation gives us something which we continually seek on the material level as well - freedom from sorrows.

Now, Shri Krishna says something that he has not said anywhere else in the Gita. He says that we must make a firm determination to attain the state of the perfected meditator. He emphasizes that the state of the perfected meditator is the goal that we should aim towards. It is like a parent telling his child that he should focus on obtaining his graduate degree. It implies that the child will put effort in school, high school

and college, all the way until he gets his graduate degree. If each part of the curriculum is followed, the goal is attained easily.

Similarly, the Gita gives us a curriculum for attainment of liberation. It introduces us to the eternal essence in the second chapter. In the third chapter, it explains the method of giving up the sense of "mine" through karma yoga. In the fourth and fifth chapter, it explains the method of giving up the sense of doership i.e. "I am the doer" through karma sanyaasa. When the sense of I and mine is given up, our mind is then ready to get established in the understanding that the eternal essence is our own self through meditation.

Having said this, Shri Krishna is extremely pragmatic. He knows that this goal is not easy. It is going to take a long time. We will encounter obstacles in the way that may demotivate us or make us despondent and frustrated. So therefore, he says that we should not let the mind become despondent. Each time we encounter an obstacle that pushes us off the path of meditation, we get up and continue, again and again.

What are these obstacles and how to deal with them? This topic is taken up in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 24, Chapter 6

sankalpaprabhavaankaamaanstyaktvaa sarvaanasheshataha |
manasaivendriyagraamam viniyamya samantataha || 24 ||

sankalpa : thought projections
 prabhavaan : born from
 kaamaan : desires
 tyaktvaa : discarding
 sarvaan : all
 asheshataha : totally
 manasaa : mind
 indriyagraamam : sense objects
 viniyamya : withdrawing
 samantataha : everywhere

Totally discarding all desires born out of thought projections, withdrawing the mind from sense objects everywhere.

In this and the next shloka, Shri Krishna gives us a method for dealing with one of the biggest challenges in meditation : uncontrolled desires. He says that in order to fulfill the goal of keeping the mind established in the self, we have to completely withdraw the mind from all sense objects and tackle desires at their root.

As we have seen in the "ladder of fall" in the second chapter, a thought is born as soon as we begin brooding or daydreaming over an object, person or situation towards which we have raaga (attraction) or dvesha (hatred). The more time we spend brooding on the object, the more force is gathered by the thought, just like a snowball gathering momentum.

It is this brooding over objects that we like or hate that has to be checked. Only this restraint will stop desires in their tracks. But to pull this off, we have to follow a multi-pronged approach. First, we have to be aware of our thinking process so that we can stop the brooding the instant it starts. It is just like stopping any phone calls or outside interference when we are in an important meeting. Next, we have to apply this technique to all types of brooding or daydreaming, not just to objects we hate. Finally, we have to constantly examine our likes and dislikes so that we can develop dispassion towards them.

Foremost around "desire-generators" are sense objects. Our sense organs are programmed to rush towards objects that they like, and rush away from things that they dislike. While they rush, they drag our mind along, causing distraction and agitation. That is why it is advised to meditate in a clean and quiet place so that the sense organs cannot come into contact with anything and distract us. Gradually, as we get more proficient in meditation, we should ensure that the sense organs do not take in strong impressions that can pop up later in meditation. For example, if we love oranges, then we should be careful not to eat an orange just before meditation, otherwise the mind will keep thinking about the orange.

Now, once the mind has been withdrawn from the senses, it will seek an outlet for the outward force that used to rush out towards sense objects. If this force is not provided with a suitable outlet, we will get into trouble. So what should we do with all the latent energy that is stored up? Shri Krishna discusses this point in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 25, Chapter 6

*shanaihi shanairoopamedbuddhyaa dhritigrheetayaa |
aatmasamstham manah kritvaa na kinchidapi chintayet || 25 ||*

With firm resolve and regularity, slowly but surely, withdraw (the mind) through the intellect. Having established the mind in the self, do not think even a little bit about anything else.

shanaih : slowly
shanaih : slowly
upamet : withdraw
buddhyaa : through the intellect
dhritigrheetayaa : with firm resolve and regularity
aatmasamstham : established in the self
manah : mind
kritvaa : do
na : not
kinchit : even a little bit about
api : anything else
chintayet : think

In the prior shloka, Shri Krishna advised the meditator to detach the mind from sense objects, and to control desires by checking unwanted thoughts. In this shloka, Shri Krishna goes deeper into the topic of focusing attention on one thought. He says that the meditator should use his intellect to withdraw the mind from all material thoughts in order to focus the mind on the one thought : "I am the self".

In the third chapter, we had encountered the hierarchy of our personality where we saw that the mind is higher than the senses, and the intellect is higher than the mind. What does it mean for the meditator? It means that even though the mind is hard to control, our intellect has the power to rein it in. In other words, the meditator should use the intellect to control the mind.

The mind likes to be busy. It hops from one thought to another at lightning fast speeds. Once we withdraw the mind from the senses, the mind gets restless because it cannot run after sense objects. In order to keep busy, it starts thinking about the past and the future. So therefore, Shri Krishna asks us to use our intellect to rein in the mind. This withdrawal is called "buddhi upamet" in the shloka.

How does one do that? Let's take dieting as an example. Imagine that our doctor has asked us to go on strict diet for 2 weeks. Our first step is to control the senses by not keeping any undesirable food in the house. When this happens, the mind will continuously think about food, and tempt the body to do undesirable things, e.g. go out of the house to get fatty food and so on. The mind becomes agitated and restless, which is a recipe for disaster.

At this point, we use our intellect that has received the doctor's instructions to check the mind. We think : "I respect the doctor. Therefore, mind, stop contemplating undesirable food since it will have negative consequences for me". When we think this thought, we can control the

mind's rush into food-related thoughts.

Similarly during meditation, we can withdraw the mind using the intellect. We need to have an intellect that has read and heard about the eternal essence. It understands that any thought other than "I am the self" does not have a place in meditation. Each time an unwanted thought comes, we should use the intellect to gently but firmly shift focus from that thought and put the mind back into the main thought of "I am the self".

Shri Krishna says that this method could take weeks, months or years. Therefore, he asks us to do it "shanaih shanaih" or slowly slowly, with great fortitude and patience. We should constantly meditate over the thought : " I am the self". Other than this thought, there should be no other thought. Each time the mind strays, we should not think that we have failed and get dejected. We should again bring the mind back slowly to the one main thought. A time will come when even that one thought will slowly dissipate, leaving the mind motionless and enabling the self to shine through.

When done correctly, we generate a lot of energy will radiate from our personality. This "tapas" or energy was always within us, but used to leak out through our mind and sense organs.

Now, the mind has another issue. It moves from thought to thought with great speed. This is taken up in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 26, Chapter 6

*yato yato nishcharati manashchanchalamasthiram |
tatastato niyamyaitadaatmanyeva vasham nayet || 26 ||*

yataha : wherever
nishcharati : strays
manaha : mind
chanchalam : fickle
asthiram : unstable
tataha : from there
niyamyā : remove
etat : it
aatmani : self
eva : only
vasham : focus
nayet : constantly

Wherever the fickle and unstable mind strays, remove it from there and constantly focus it only on the self.

Having asked the meditator to slowly but surely practice meditation, Shri Krishna elaborates on what exactly is the aspect of meditation that needs constant practice and repetition. He urges the meditator to check the mind as soon as it strays into another thought, and bring it back to the thought of the self. The meditator has to do this again and again, each time the mind strays. It is one of the most practical shlokas about meditation.

As we practice meditation, we begin to appreciate the speed at which the mind moves from thought to thought. For example, let's say that the thought of taking a one week vacation enters the mind. It then leads to a chain of thoughts. First the mind makes a list of all our favourite vacations spots. Then it calculates how much each place will cost. Then it visualizes what each of those places looks like. It might also bring up memories of past vacations. The mind has thought all of this within seconds. By the time we are aware that the mind is thinking like this, it has strayed far away from the object of meditation.

So therefore, Shri Krishna urges us to be extremely vigilant and alert with regards to our thoughts during meditation. We have to cultivate this vigilance as a habit. We have vigilant habits in other parts of our life. Men, for example, check their face daily for any stray hairs just after shaving. Similarly, we should be vigilant about stray thoughts during meditation. The constant practice of removing stray thoughts is called "abhyaasa".

The mind loves to stray towards thoughts about objects, people and situations that we have given importance to. Abhyaasa helps us diminish our importance towards stray thoughts. Shri Shankaraachaarya in his commentary gives us a wonderful tip with regards to abhyaasa. Each time we encounter a stray thought, we should instantly analyze it like a scientist. We should inspect each thought and say: it is nothing but name and form on top of the eternal essence. If the thought is about name and form only, then it is not real, it does not have "saty-

atva". And if it is not real, it is not important, so I should not go after it.

Furthermore, if the very same thought occurs the next time, we should inspect it and say : I have already determined that this thought is not important to me. If we do so each time that same thought comes, we develop dispassion or vairagya towards it. Only then will meditation work properly.

If we follow this technique, the mind will eventually become quiet
- "prashaanta".

Bhagavad Gita Verse 27, Chapter 6

*prashaantamanasam hyonam yoginam sukhामuttamama |
upaiti shaantarajasam brahmabhootamakalmasham || 27 ||*

Supreme joy certainly obtains this yogi with serene mind, whose passion has been quietened, who has become the eternal essence, and who is without sin.

prashaanta : serene
manasam : mind
hi : certainly
enam : this
yoginam : yogi
sukham : joy
uttamam : supreme
upaiti : obtains
shaanta : quietened
rajasam : passion
brahmabhootam : become the eternal
essence
akalmasham : without sin

In one of the most classic shlokas of this chapter, Shri Krishna does something which is next to impossible - he puts the result of meditation into words that we can understand. He says that supreme joy comes to the meditator whose mind is quiet and free from sin, who has calmed his passions and who has identified with the eternal essence.

What is our situation in life for the most part? We constantly run after sukham or joy. If there is any chance of happiness that is within reach, we run after it. Unfortunately, whenever we run after joy, joy tends to run away from us. It is hard to catch. In the rare instance that we possess joy, we beg it to stay. We do not ever want it to leave us. This is also easier said than done.

Shri Krishna says that in the case of the meditator, it is joy that runs after him. It comes to the meditator and asks him "shall I stay with you?". The meditator becomes what is sought after, joy becomes the seeker. Moreover, it is not ordinary joy that comes after the meditator. It is the most supreme joy. This is the difference between a bhogi and a yogi. A bhogi runs after joy, but joy runs after a yogi.

Now, how is the mind of such a yogi? It is extremely quiet, like a calm lake. He is able to view any kind of situation that impacts him with such dispassion that it is like watching the situation happen to an unrelated person. If it is a disturbing situation, let's say he suffers an accident, he smiles just like we smile at a character in a movie. There are absolutely no complaints for any situation from a yogi.

Next, Shri Krishna says that the yogi is "shaanta rajasam", he has silenced the quality of passion within him. Rajas, the mode of nature that causes us to go outside ourselves, is present in visible as well as in subtle form inside us. Through karmayoga, we can check the visible forms of rajas to a large extent. But it is only through meditation that we can completely remove the invisible, subtle traces of rajas within

us. Till all the rajas is silenced, we should let it express in the form of performance of our duties, not any other actions.

Furthermore, the mind of the meditator is pervaded with a single thought "I am the eternal essence". This is indicated by the word "brahmabhootam" in this shloka. When the meditator has identified himself with brahman, and removed his identification with everything else, then he automatically becomes one with the eternal essence. The removal of everything else in the form of impurities is indicated by the word "akalmasham".

Shri Krishna concludes this topic in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 28, Chapter 6

*yunjannevaṁ sadaatmaanam yogee vigatakalmaṣaha |
sukhena brahmasamsparśhamatyantam sukhamaśhrute || 28 ||*

In this manner, the sinless yogi, always engaged in the self, joyfully contacts the eternal essence, experiencing infinite bliss.

yunjan : engaged
evam : in this manner
sadaa : always
aatmaanam : in the self
yogi : yogi
vigatakalmaṣaha : sinless
sukhena : joyfully
brahma : eternal essence
samsparśham : contacts
atyantam : infinite
sukham : bliss
aśhrute : experiences

With this shloka, Shri Krishna concludes the topic of the meditation process. He says that one who follows the step by step approach towards meditation obtains infinite joy and happiness because he comes into contact with the eternal essence.

The word "evam" here refers to the step-by-step approach to meditation that has been prescribed here. Shri Krishna says that only by following this approach can the eternal essence be realized. There are several methods to meditation, but it is important to follow a disciplined approach in order to obtain the result mentioned in this shloka. It is like the purification of gold. Only a certain process will ensure that the mined gold will shine.

Next, Shri Krishna highlights that the yogi needs to have continually kept focus on the method of meditation with the word "vigata kalmashah" which means without any defects or sins. Meditation cannot yield results if the mind still harbours impurities in the form of vaasanaas and desires. A purified mind is a prerequisite to meditation.

Finally, what does is the end result of meditation? It is ultimate happiness or sukha, obtained by contact with brahman, the eternal essence. The literal translation is : "the yogi touches brahman". Brahman is of the nature of infinite joy and bliss. Anyone who identifies with it also gains such infinite joy - "atyanta sukham".

With this shloka, the explanation of the process of meditation is concluded. We can go much deeper into the process of meditation, discuss further obstacles and so on. Other texts cover those obstacles in greater detail. Next, Shri Krishna illustrates the change in the vision of the meditator, which is the final topic in this chapter on meditation.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 29, Chapter 6

*sarvabhootasthamaatmaanam sarvabhootani chaatmani |
eekshate yogayuktaatmaa sarvatra samadarshanaha || 29 ||*

sarvabhootastham : present in all beings
aatmaanam : his self
sarvabhootani : all beings
cha : and
aatmani : in his own self
eekshate : sees
yogayuktaatmaa : one established in
yoga
sarvatra : everywhere
samadarshanaha : equanimous vision

One who is established in yoga, one with equanimous vision everywhere, sees his self in all beings, and all beings in his own self.

So far, Shri Krishna was talking about the process of meditation, what should be the meditator's approach, how should he sit and so on. But having come out of meditation, what is the vision of the perfected meditator?

Shri Krishna says that the perfected meditator sees his self in all beings, and all beings in his self. It is difficult to comprehend what this means without actually practising meditation. We can do our best to understand it through an example.

We will use the illustration of the wave and the ocean as our running example. As an individual, we have a name and a form. In the same way, we can assume that each wave in the ocean has a (fictitious) name and form. If we go with this analogy, then we can consider ourselves as one of those waves.

Meditation enables us to expand the notion of what a wave is. So first, we begin to see that although there are different kinds of waves in the ocean, in essence, they are nothing but name and form. Some waves are big, some are small. Some last for a few seconds, some last for much longer than that. Now I could be a small wave and you could be a big wave, but both of us are waves nevertheless. It is akin to realizing that we are all in the same family, company, nation and so on.

This stage of the perfected meditator's vision is indicated by the words "he sees his self in all beings".

As we further expand our vision, we begin to unravel the base of all these waves. We think: yes, all of us are waves, but what holds us together? We then realize that all waves no matter how big or small are contained in the ocean. The ocean is infinitely larger than all of the waves put together. None of the waves can exist without the ocean.

The final stage of this vision is reached when we as the wave real-

ize that the ocean also is a name and form, even though it is infinitely larger than all of the waves put together. At its essence, it is nothing but water. I am the wave is water, other waves are water, the ocean is also water.

This state is indicated by the words "he sees all beings in his own self", and such a person is called "sarvatra samadarshanaha", one with equal vision.

Another point made in this shloka is that this "seeing" does not happen just with one's eyes. This vision comes out of wisdom. Such vision is sometimes referred to as the "third eye". This is the vision of a "sthitaprajnya" that was briefly discussed in the second chapter.

This topic is further elaborated upon in the next few shlokas.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 30, Chapter 6

*yo maam pashyati sarvatra sarvam cha mayi pashyati |
tasyaaham na pranashyaami sa cha me naa pranashyati || 30 ||*

One who sees me in all, and sees all in me, to him I am not lost, and he is not lost to me.

Shri Krishna now speaks to us directly as Ishvara. He says that the devotee who sees him in everything, and also sees everything in him, will have a permanent connection to him. In other words, Shri Krishna will never appear as distant or invisible to that devotee. It may seem a little confusing to hear this statement right after the previous shloka that said that one should see everything in the eternal essence. How does Ishvara fit into the picture?

Let us refer to our running example of the wave and the ocean. Imagine that a young child sees the ocean for the first time. Her intellect can only grasp visual, grosser objects. So her attention will immediately go towards the ocean, its colour, its size, the sounds it makes, the waves and so on. It will not be obvious to her that everything is water, because she has not reached that intellectual level yet.

Shri Krishna fully knows that most of us are children, even babies, on the spiritual journey. It will take a long time for our intellects to see the eternal essence everywhere. So until our perception stops operating on the level of names and forms, we have to find an easier way to see the eternal essence everywhere.

Therefore, Shri Krishna says that first, we should try to see everything in Ishvara and Ishvara in everything. Ishvara could be the form of Shri Krishna. It could be any other deity that we feel an affinity towards. It could also be our guru. No matter what form we choose, we should be able to view the form of Ishvara as the highest.

Now, most of us have the notion that Ishvara or God is a mysterious figure or force that is sitting far away in Kailash or Vaikuntha or somewhere else. But Shri Krishna, in the Gita, is telling us in this shloka that he is everywhere. It requires a radical shift in order to think this way. That is why in Indian culture, everything can become an object of worship, from a tree to a stone to a book, because Ishvara is present in everything. What is required is the understanding that comes through

yaha : one who
maam : me
pashyati : sees
sarvatra : in all
sarvam : all
cha : and
mayi : in me
pashyati : sees
tasya : to him
aham : I
na : am not
pranashyaami : lost
saha : he
cha : and
me : me
naa : is not
pranashyati : lost

contemplation.

So therefore, if we truly begin to think that the whole world comprises Ishvara in our chosen form, there will never be a single moment where we are far from Ishvara.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 31, Chapter 6

*sarvabhootasthitam yo maam bhajatyekatvamaastitaha |
sarvathaa vartamaanopi sa yogi mayi vartate || 31 ||*

Established in oneness with me, one who beholds me as present in all beings, that yogi resides within me, in all circumstances.

In order to emphasize the oneness of the individual with the absolute, Shri Krishna says that the yogi who sees him present in all beings is always residing in him, no matter what circumstance the yogi finds himself in. In other words, the devotee does not lose his connection with Ishvara in any and all worldly and spiritual pursuits.

First, let us refer back to our wave and ocean example to understand what is meant by "ekatvam" or oneness. If the wave sees himself as part of the ocean, and also sees the other waves as part of the ocean, it ultimately realizes that everything is the ocean. It realizes that there is no separation of wave and ocean, and in doing so, attains oneness with the ocean. Similarly, Shri Krishna says that the yogi who sees all beings in Ishvara, discards any thought of separation from Ishvara. He thus attains oneness with Ishvara.

Here is another example. Let us say that we attend a cricket match where India is playing against some other team. If we sit alongside the Indian team fans, there is no way we can ever forget the India team. Why? Someone will have the Indian team logo on their shirt or on their cap. Someone will be chanting the player's names. Someone will be holding up cardboard signs. No matter where we look or what we hear, it will be something about the India team. We will see the India team spirit in everyone. There will be no thought of separation from the India team.

Furthermore, Shri Krishna says that the yogi never loses this oneness, it stays with him no matter what transaction he conducts in this world. Many of us have a hands-free headset that lets us stay connected on a phone call regardless of whether we are walking, climbing stairs, shopping and so on. The yogi thus maintains an "always-on" connection with Ishvara. The yogi does not need to go on a pilgrimage or visit any specific temple, because he is always connected to Ishvara.

Now, this does not mean that going to temples or pilgrimages is not

sarvabhootasthitam : present in all beings
yaha : one who
maam : me
bhajati : beholds
ekatvam : oneness
aastitaha : established
sarvathaa : all
vartamaanaha : circumstances
sa : that
yogi : yogi
mayi : within me
vartate : resides

encouraged. These places create a conducive environment for the seeker to focus his thoughts on Ishvara, which definitely accelerates the spiritual progress. But the notion that "Ishvara is in this object, and nowhere else" is incorrect, it should be discarded.

In his commentary, Shri Shankaraacharyaaji says that for such a yogi, there is nothing that can obstruct his liberation or moksha. He is ever-liberated or nitya-mukta, because he knows that he was never bound in the first place.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 32, Chapter 6

*aatmaopamyena sarvatra samam pashyati yorjuna |
sukham vaayadivaa dukham sa yogi paramo mathaha || 32 ||*

By comparing himself to everything, one who sees the same, O Arjuna, whether in joy or in sorrow, such a yogi is considered supreme.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna concludes his discourse on the topic of meditation. He also summarizes the entire topic of meditation. He says that one who sees himself in others, and thus experiences their joys and sorrows, becomes a yogi or meditator of the highest caliber.

This is a simple, straightforward and practical teaching that is central tenet of most religions: "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Shri Krishna echoes that golden rule in this shloka. He says that the perfected meditator sees no difference between himself and other beings, just like we do not see differences between our left and right hand, or other parts of the body.

If the meditator sees no difference between himself and other beings, then any negative emotions such as jealousy, hatred, greed and anger go away. When one cannot get angry at one's right hand or left leg, how one get angry with anyone or anything if all are part of the same "being"? In other words, the meditator "puts himself in the other person's shoes". He experiences joy when others are happy. He experiences sorrow when others feel sad.

Moreover, one who obtains such a vision will never hurt anyone else physically, mentally or verbally. Such an attitude of non-violence or ahimsa comes naturally to a meditator, since meditation is next to impossible for a person that harbours any kind of hatred or negative emotion towards anyone.

With this shloka, Shri Krishna concludes the topic of meditation. But the chapter is not over yet. In the next shloka, Arjuna raises a doubt that many of us would agree with.

aatmaopamyena : by comparing himself
to
sarvatra : everything
samam : same
pashyati : see
yaha : one who
arjuna : O Arjuna
sukham : joy
vaa : in
yadi : whether
vaa : or in
dukham : sorrow
saha : such a
yogi : yogi
parami : supreme
mathaha : is considered

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 33, Chapter 6**Arjuna uvaacha:**yoyam yogastvayaa proktaha saamyena madhusudhana |
etasyaaham na pashyaami chanchalatvaatsthitim sthiraam ||*

yaha : of
 ayam : this
 yogaha : yoga
 tvayaa : you have
 proktaha : spoken of
 saamyena : equanimity
 madhusudhana : O slayer of Madhu
 etasya : in that
 aham : I
 na : do not
 pashyaami : envision
 sthitim : state
 sthiraam : stability

**Arjuna said:Of this yoga of equanimity that you have spoken of,
 O slayer of Madhu, I do not envision stability in that state, due to
 the fickle nature (of the mind).**

Arjuna was listening attentively to Shri Krishna's discourse on meditation. As the discourse concluded, he asked Krishna, the slayer of the demon Madhu, a series of clarifying questions. The first question that Arjuna raised was : how can we remain established in the meditative state, when the mind is so fickle? He then further elaborates on this question in the following shlokas.

Arjuna, being the perfect student, summarized the entire discourse of the sixth chapter in one word: "saamyena" or equanimity. The end goal of meditation is not some magic power or levitation or anything like that. It is the ability to see the eternal essence pervading everything, and thereby develop an attitude of equanimity or sameness towards everything and everyone. This vision reaches its peak when we do not perceive any difference between us and the world, giving us everlasting peace and joy.

But, as Arjuna states, it is difficult for someone to maintain such a vision because the untrained mind will not allow it. It may be possible to develop that vision for a few seconds, maybe for a few minutes, but not more than that. Moreover, it is difficult to see one's own self in someone we hate or dislike. If we try to see our self in such a person, the mind quickly changes that thought from "I am the self of that person" to "he did a bad thing to me last year".

Arjuna further elaborates on the fickleness of the mind in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 34, Chapter 6

*chanchalam hi manaha krishna pramaathi balavaddrudham |
tasyaaham nigraham manye vaayoriva sudushkaram || 34 ||*

chanchalam : fickle
hi : for
manaha : mind is
krishna : O Krishna
pramaathi : rebellious
balavat : strong
drudham : stubborn
tasya : it
aham : I
nigraham : control
manye : think
vaayoho : the wind
iva : like
sudushkaram : arduous

**For, the mind is fickle, rebellious, strong and stubborn, O Krishna.
To control it, I think, is as arduous as the wind.**

Arjuna further elaborates on the difficulty of controlling the mind for meditation to Shri Krishna. He says that it is as difficult as trying to harness the wind. Why is that so? The mind is fickle, rebellious, strong and stubborn. It will refuse any attempt to be controlled.

Shri Krishna had acknowledged the fickle nature of the mind in previous shlokas. We ourselves have directly experienced how fickle our mind is. Most of the time, our mind is jumping from one thought to another. Many analogies have been offered to illustrate this fickle nature of the mind. The most common one is a drunken monkey jumping from one branch to another. We can also tell how fickle someone's mind is by observing their eyes. If they dart around too much, that means their mind is racing through thoughts.

Next, Arjuna says that the mind is "pramaathi". It is difficult to exactly translate this word. The closest word is "rebellious". It is like a wild horse that is being tamed for the first time. It will never let the rider stay on its back for more than a few seconds. Trying to control the mind becomes a wrestling match where the opponent does not let us get a good grip on him.

Furthermore, Arjuna refers to the mind as strong and stubborn. In other words, once the "mind is made up", or the mind has decided that it wants a certain thing, it is very hard to change it. It is like a child throwing a tantrum - it will cry, yell and scream till it gets its way. The mind will resist all efforts to be controlled, and will start creating a list of desires which will throw us completely off track.

So therefore, Arjuna sums up the difficulty of controlling the mind by comparing this endeavour to taming the wind - something that is next to impossible. Coming from Arjuna, a mighty meditator who is said to have propitiated Lord Shiva through his meditation, makes it a valid question. Shri Krishna responds to Arjuna's question in the next shloka.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 35, Chapter 6**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**asamshayam mahaabaaho mano durnigraham chalam |
abhyaasena tu kaunteya vairagyena cha grihyate || 35 ||*

asamshayam : indeed
 mahaabaaho : O mighty armed
 manaha : the mind
 durnigraham : hard to restrain
 chalam : fickle
 abhyaasena : constant discipline
 tu : but
 kaunteya : O Kaunteya
 vairagyena : dispassion
 cha : and
 grihyate : controlled

Shree Bhagavaan said: Indeed, the mind is hard to restrain and fickle, O Kaunteya. But through constant discipline and dispassion, O Kaunteya, it can be controlled.

Having heard Arjuna's question with regards to the difficulty of controlling the mind, Shri Krishna responded by first agreeing with Arjuna's statement. This no doubt provided a dose of encouragement to the ever-diligent student Arjuna. By referring to Arjuna as the son of Kunti, Shri Krishna also hinted that a son of such a valiant mother is capable of undertaking the formidable challenge of taming the mind.

Shri Krishna then said that the mind, though hard to restrain, can be controlled through constant discipline and dispassion, it can be controlled. Shri Krishna provided a two-pronged approach to controlling the mind, and in doing so, summarized the entire spiritual technique of the Gita.

When we transition from college to the workplace, we have to learn new ways of doing things, and also, we have to unlearn some habits. Any transition requires learning new ways and dropping old ways. Abhyaasa or discipline is what we have to learn and practice. Materialistic and desire-oriented thinking is what we have to give up or unlearn through the practice of constant dispassion.

First, let us look at abhyaasa or discipline. It is the technique of constant hearing, contemplation and internalization of knowledge (shravanam, mananam and nidhidhyaasana) that reveals our true self. Due to ignorance inherent in the human condition, we forget our true self and think that we are this finite body, mind and intellect. We need to continually hear the knowledge of the eternal essence to remove this ignorance. But even before we can reach a stage where we can hear such knowledge, we first need to clear our mind of impurities in the form of selfish desires, and the notion of doership and enjoyership.

That is why Shri Krishna prescribed the practice of karma yoga in order to first clear the mind of selfish desires. Karma yoga slowly leads

to karma sanyaasa, where we slowly give up the notion of doership and enjoyership. Only then will the mind be able to contemplate upon and internalize the knowledge of the self through meditation. This is abhyaasa or constant discipline.

But this is not enough. We have to give up our attachment to people, objects and situations so that our mind stops becoming agitated. This can only happen when we stop and check the mind each time it rushes out into the world, and examine whether we will truly get joy through the object that the target of the mind.

If the mind gets excited when it sees our favourite fried dish, we have to examine whether or not that dish has the capability to give us permanent joy, or whether it sows the seed for future sorrow, perhaps in the form of cholesterol or even indigestion. Such a constant, disciplined investigation automatically brings forth dispassion.

So therefore, with the two-pronged approach of constant discipline and dispassion, we can slowly purge the mind of unwanted desires, leaving room for contemplation and meditation. But what if someone attempts to meditate without controlling the mind? Shri Krishna answers this question in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 36, Chapter 6

*asaiyataatmanaa yogo dushpraapa iti me matihi |
vashayaatmanaa tu yatataa shakyovaaptumupaayataha || 36 ||*

Yoga is inaccessible for one with an uncontrolled mind, this is my opinion. But, for one with a controlled mind who strives intelligently, it is possible to attain.

Previously, Shri Krishna spoke about the importance of disciplined practice and dispassion in controlling the mind. In order to emphasize this point, he says that a person who is not in control of his mind cannot ever attain the state of the meditator. Moreover, he advises Arjuna to put forth tons of effort, but do so dexterously and intelligently. Note that he does not issue any edict, he says that this is his opinion, take it or leave it.

Let us first look at the notion of meditation with an uncontrolled mind. Pursuing meditation without first controlling the mind could prove harmful, just like trying to tame a wild elephant by directly mounting it is physically harmful. The wildness of the mind is caused by hordes of desires living in the mind. We may know our conscious desires, but we have no idea of all kinds of desires that are lurking within our subconscious mind, and how powerful they are.

Many meditators think that they have conquered their minds within a few days, and lull themselves into a false sense of accomplishment. Some others get rid of all their material possessions and retire to an ashram. In both cases, they are brought back to reality when one of those desires rears its ugly head and completely overpowers the meditator.

Now, that is exactly why Shri Krishna recommends that our spiritual practice should be practiced intelligently. He uses the word "upaayataha" which is derived from the word "upaaya" meaning solution. It means that spiritual practice requires us to become "solution-oriented" or analytical in our approach. It requires us to focus and pay attention and be aware of each and every desire that lurks in our mind, just like a scientist conducts research in a lab. Simply abandoning all material objects may seem like dispassion, but it will not rid us of latent desires.

With this statement, Shri Krishna answered Arjuna's question around

asaiyataatmanaa : one with uncontrolled mind
yogaha : yoga
dushpraapa : inaccessible
iti : this
me : my
matihi : opinion
vashayaatmanaa : one with controlled mind
tu : but
yatataa : strive
shakyaha : possible
avaaptum : to attain
upaayataha : intelligently

the difficulty of controlling the mind. Arjuna asks Shri Krishna another question in the next shloka.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 37, Chapter 6**Arjuna uvaacha:**ayatihi shraddhayopeto yogaachchalitamaanasaha |**apraapya yogasamsiddhim kaam gatim krishna gachchati || 37 ||*

ayatihi : unsuccessful seeker
 shraddhaa : faith
 upetaha : endowed with
 yogaat : yoga
 chalitamaanasaha : deviates mind
 apraapya : not obtained
 yogasamsiddhim : perfection in yoga
 kaam : what
 gatim : situation
 krishna : O Krishna
 gachchati : attain

Arjuna said: The unsuccessful seeker, endowed with faith, whose mind deviates from yoga, and has not attained perfection in yoga, what is his situation, O Krishna?

Arjuna's first question around the difficulty of controlling the mind was resolved by Shri Krishna. Now Arjuna asked another question: what happens when a seeker is striving to meditate faithfully and diligently, but is unable to reach the state of the perfected meditator in his lifetime?

Attaining perfection in meditation is a long and arduous journey. Most seekers start on the spiritual path only after they have established themselves in their careers, which is a late start. Once they have begun, purification of the mind through karma yoga takes time. Hearing and reflection on the scriptures takes still more time. All in all, even if a seeker is sincere, it is going to take a long time to attain the goal of meditation.

Taking this into account, Arjuna formulates his question to Shri Krishna. He gives an example of a seeker who has managed to purify his mind to a great extent, but still has a small amount of desire left. This seeker may have comprehended that his true nature is the eternal essence, but is not able to remain established in that state. So the question is : what happens to such an "almost perfect" seeker?

The honest nature of this question shows to us the candid and open relationship between Arjuna and Shri Krishna. In effect, he is asking his teacher whether or not it is worth pursuing the spiritual path. It is a pragmatic question that many of us fear or fail to ask before pursuing undertakings in the material world, let alone in the spiritual path.

Arjuna further expands upon this question in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 38, Chapter 6

*kashchinnobhayavibhrashtashchinnabhramiva nashyati |
apratishtha mahaabaaho vimoodhaa brahmanam pathi || 38 ||*

ubhaya : both
chinnabhram : scattered cloud
iva : like
nashyati : destroyed
apratishtha : without any worldly glory
mahaabaaho : O mighty armed
vimoodhaha : distracted
brahmana : spiritual
pathi : path

Unsuccessful in both ways, with no worldly glory, distracted in the spiritual path, doesn't the seeker get destroyed like a scattered cloud, O mighty armed?

Arjuna further elaborates upon his question to Shri Krishna with regards to the promise of meditation. To understand this better, let's examine a saying in Hindi : "dhobi ka kutta, na ghar kaa na ghaat kaa". Loosely translated, it refers to a situation where someone has two jobs but because he cannot do either job properly, he loses from both sides in the end.

Arjuna wanted Shri Krishna to tell him whether someone who follows the spiritual path, but is not able to attain fulfillment, ends up in a similar situation. Arjuna uses the analogy of a cloud that neither provides rain, nor does it vanish. This in-between situation makes it an easy target for winds to scatter the cloud from one place to another.

If we were to frame this as an economic problem, Arjuna is speaking about opportunity cost, which is the loss incurred in one activity by spending time in another activity. If the seeker devotes a large amount of his time and effort towards meditation, but fails to attain the desired outcome, is it worth it? He could have very easily have devoted this time to worldly pursuits and obtained wealth, status and thereby secured his worldly position.

Instead, the seeker is "ubhaya-vibhrashta" or unsuccessful from both sides. One side is "apratishtha" or lack of worldly glory, and the other is "vimoodha brahmana pathi" or distracted in progress on the spiritual path. Arjuna, the pragmatic soldier, does not want to get into such a compromising position. He adds one more element to this question in the next shloka, after which he lets Shri Krishna answer.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 39, Chapter 6

*etanme samshayam krishna chhettumarhasyasheshataha |
tvadanyaha samshayasyaasya chhettaa na hyupapadyate || 39 ||*

To dispel this doubt of mine, O Krishna, only you are worthy. For, other than you, no one is fit to dispel this doubt.

Arjuna offers one last point in his question to Shri Krishna with regards to the promise of meditation. Earlier, Arjuna wanted to know the fate of the seeker who strives hard but does not reach the state of the perfected meditator before he dies. He then added an illustration of the cloud that is helplessly scattered by winds, comparing it to a seeker who achieves neither spiritual nor material success. Arjuna makes a final point in this question by reminding Shri Krishna that only he can answer this question.

By now, Arjuna had come to the conclusion that Shri Krishna was something more than his friend and charioteer. In some shlokas, Shri Krishna even referred to himself as Ishvara. Only one who is beyond the material world can answer a question that transcends the material world, and that is Ishvara himself. Therefore, Arjuna found it fit to ask such a question to Shri Krishna.

The answer to this question is given by Shri Krishna in the upcoming shlokas. These shlokas comprise the final portion of the sixth chapter.

etat : this
me : my
samshayam : doubt
krishna : O Krishna
chhettum : dispel
arhasi : you are worthy
asheshataha : completely
tvadanyaha : other than you
samshayasyaasya : of this doubt
chhettaa : one who can dispel
na : none
hi : for
upapadyate : is fit

Bhagavad Gita Verse 40, Chapter 6

Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:

paartha naiveha naamutra vinaashastasya vidyate |

na hi kalyaanakritkashchiddurgatim taata gachchati || 40 ||

Shree Bhagavan says: O Paartha, neither here nor there does his destruction ever happen, for whoever performs virtuous acts does not go into distress, my dear.

Arjuna had posed a question about the fate of a meditator who does not attain perfection before death. Shri Krishna responds by unequivocally asserting that nothing harmful or distressful will happen to the meditator while he is in this world, or in any other world. In fact, he will attain a better state, both from a material as well as spiritual standpoint.

We have to carefully parse the meaning of Shri Krishna's words. He is in no way implying that the meditator will somehow attain material success due to his meditation. The common standard for attaining success in our world is wealth, power and fame, none of which is guaranteed as a result of meditation. Shri Krishna wants us to understand is that one who takes up meditation sincerely will automatically develop dispassion towards wealth, power and fame. He will not care whether he attains material success or not. So therefore, a lack of material success will not cause him distress.

But that does not mean that the meditator obtains a pitiable state. In fact, by sincerely practicing mediation, the seeker will be in tune and in harmony with the world. Then the world itself will take care of all the seeker's needs. This is not an alien concept. When someone is in tune with any organization like one's family, workplace or school, when that person puts the needs of the organization above his personal and selfish needs, the organization ensures that such a person receives whatever he wants, and also ensures that he does not get into any distress.

Here, Shri Krishna affectionately refers to Arjuna as "taata". Usually this word refers to a father or a son. Here, the meaning is in line with the word "dear student". By using this word, Shri Krishna shows his encouragement and appreciation for the frank and honest question posed by Arjuna.

paartha : O Paartha

na : neither

iha : here

eva : ever

na : nor

amutra : there

vinaashaha : destruction

tasya : his

vidyate : happen

na : does not

hi : for

kalyaanakrit : performs virtuous acts

kashchit : whoever

durgatim : distress

taata : my dear

gachchati : go to

Next, Shri Krishna addresses the second part of Arjuna's question, which is : what happens to the meditator when he dies before gaining perfection in meditation?

Bhagavad Gita Verse 41, Chapter 6

*praapya punyakritaam lokaanushitvaa shaashvateeh samaaha |
hucheenaam shreemataam gehe yogabhrashtobhijaayate || 41 ||*

praapya : having obtained
punyakritaam : performers of virtuous
deeds
lokaan : worlds of
ushitvaa : resided
shaashvateeh : several
samaaha : years
shucheenaam : pure
shreemataam : illustrious
gehe : home
yogabhrasht : that one who has fallen
from yoga
abhijaayate : is born

Obtaining those worlds destined for performers of virtuous deeds, and residing there for several years, that one who has fallen from yoga is born in the home of the pure and illustrious.

Shri Krishna continues to answer Arjuna's question with regards to what happens to the unfulfilled meditator after death. He says that such a meditator attains heaven, and having stayed there for a long period of time, he is born into an illustrious family.

Many of us strive to perform meritorious acts or "punya" throughout our life, and at the same time try to avoid or minimize demerits or "paapa". The difference between paapa and punya determines our fate after death. Those that have an excess of punya go to heaven after death, others go to hell. So Shri Krishna says that one who follows the path of meditation is automatically qualified to access the very same heaven that is attained by people who have performed immeasurable meritorious deeds. He does not have to worry about counting merits and demerits, he just has to continue meditating.

Now, no matter how much pleasure it gives, the stay in heaven is always temporary. Once the allotted time runs out, the unfulfilled meditator will have to come back into the world. But it will not be such a bad thing. He will attain an environment that is conducive for continuing his spiritual journey. Shri Krishna says that such a person will be born into an illustrious family, one that is endowed not only with material wealth but also spiritual prowess.

Why should such a family need to have material wealth? The primary reason for the meditator to remain unfulfilled is that he still carried around traces of material desire. The new family that he is born into will give him the opportunity to get those material desires out of his system. As we have seen earlier, perfect meditation is possible only when material desires are addressed holistically.

Many of us may not be able to digest the notion of heaven and rebirth. In any case, Shri Krishna wants to assure us that the very laws of nature that take care of the meditator while he is alive will ensure

that he will be taken care of even after death.

Do all unfulfilled meditators attain this state? Shri Krishna goes into this topic next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 42, Chapter 6

*athavaa yoginaameva kule bhavati dheemataam |
etaddhi durlabhataram loke janma yadeedrisham || 42 ||*

athavaa : alternatively
yoginaam : in yogis
eva : only
kule : family
bhavati : will go
dheemataam : learned
etat : this
hi : definitely
durlabhataram : exceedingly rare
loke : world
janma : birth
yat : one whose
eedrisham : of this type

Alternatively, he will go only to a family of learned yogis. One whose birth is of this type is exceedingly rare in this world.

Earlier, Shri Krishna spoke about the fate of the unfulfilled meditator who goes to an illustrious family after having attained heaven. In this shloka, Shri Krishna talks about another type of unfilled meditators who is born not into a wealthy family but into a family of learned yogis. He also says that such a birth is exceedingly rare.

So far, Shri Krishna has spoken about two types of serious seekers who had a clear understanding of meditation but were unable to attain liberation. The difference between the two types of seekers is the presence or absence of desires. The meditator who still harbours desires is born into a wealthy family.

Desires are the biggest obstacles in meditation. Only when desires are extinguished can serious meditation begin. That is why this category of meditators is given the chance to fulfill his desires in a wealthy family.

The other rarer category of meditator had managed to extinguish his desires, but could not attain liberation because he ran out of time. Since he is not interested in fulfilling any desire, regardless of whether it is heavenly or earthly, he goes straight into a family of yogis after he dies. These yogis are not just accomplished meditators, they also possess "dheemata" or a keen understanding of the scriptures.

Such a family provides a conducive environment for this kind of meditator to continue his progress in meditation. He has enough dispassion in him and therefore does not get affected by the the absence of wealth in this new family. In fact he appreciates it because wealth can become a distraction in the path of meditation.

Now, do both these types of newly-born seekers have to start their journey from scratch? This is taken up by Shri Krishna in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 43, Chapter 6

*tatra tam buddhisaiyogam labhate paurvadehikam |
yatate cha tato bhooyaha samsiddhau kurunandana || 43 ||*

tatra : there
tam : he
buddhisaiyogam : connection with
intellect
labhate : regains
paurvadehikam : prior birth
yatate : strives
cha : and
tato : using that
bhooyaha : again
samsiddhau : liberation
kurunandana : joy of the Kurus

There, he regains connection with the intellect of his prior birth, and using that, he again strives for liberation, O joy of the Kurus.

Shri Krishna had explained the fate of two types of meditators. He said that the ones that harbour desires will be born into a wealthy family, and the ones that have no desires are born into a family of accomplished meditators or yogis. He now says that the ones that are born into the yogic family reconnect with their intellect from their prior birth. In other words, their effort in their previous life does not go to waste.

We see examples of child prodigies, especially in the field of music and science, who achieve expertise in their fields within a few years of being born. Their personality is somehow pre-configured to excel in their chosen field. Such prodigies get the benefit of nature, which is their parents' genes, and nurture, which is the conducive environment for mastering their field. Similarly, those who are born into a family of meditators get the benefit of nature and nurture.

Such children find themselves attracted to satsangs, bhajans and discourses at a very early age but will not know why they are attracted. Once this happens, they will continue their spiritual journey and begin to strive for liberation automatically. Moreover, their determination will be much stronger than their prior attempt.

These children will not have any attraction for worldly pleasure because they have already experienced pleasures and had their fill. They will not harbour any further material desires. Other people will find it bewildering that these children do not get attracted by things that most children crave.

Now, what happens to the other type of unfulfilled meditator who is born into an illustrious family? Do they also get reconnected to their prior efforts? Shri Krishna speaks about this next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 44, Chapter 6

*poorvabhyaasena tenaiva hriyate hyaavashoopi saha |
jigyaasurapi yogasya shabdabrahmaativartate || 44 ||*

Though helpless, he is pushed due to his prior effort, because even the seeker of yoga transcends the words of brahman.

poorvabhyaasena : due to prior effort
tena : that
eva : only
hriyate : pushed
hi : because
avashaha : helplessly
api : though
saha : he
jigyaasuhu : seeker
api : even
yogasya : yoga
shabdabrahma : words of brahman
ativartate : transcends

Previously, Shri Krishna described the fate of the unfulfilled meditator who is born into a family of yogis. Here, he describes the fate of the other type of unfulfilled meditator who is born into a prosperous family. Shri Krishna says that even though such a person will indulge in sense pleasures, his previous efforts will push him towards rekindling his spiritual journey. This attraction or push towards spirituality will give him the potential of transcending his material pleasures.

Karma yoga teaches us how to conduct our life without gathering impressions or samskaaraas that give rise to further selfish desires. These impressions, if not destroyed, are carried over from one life into the next, and result in activation of further selfish desires. The unfulfilled meditator who is born into a prosperous family is compelled to fulfill all of his desires because this family has enough wealth for him to do so. He is "avashaha" or helpless in this regard ,due to his propensity for desires.

However, in addition to his propensities being carried forward into his new life, his spiritual efforts are also carried forward. At some point in his life, these propensities will manifest in the form of an involuntary push or attraction towards spirituality. Just like the seeker born into a yogic family is pulled, this seeker will also find himself pulled, as it were, towards satsangs, discourses and gurus. But unlike the other type of seeker who knows exactly what to do in this situation, this seeker may not know what or why this attraction happens.

Shri Krishna further says that this pull towards spiritual has the potential to take him out of his current state of indulgence in material pleasures. We have seen that engaging selfishly in the material world further ensnares us in the cycle of karma or action and reaction, which is given in the Vedas, referred here as "shabda-brahman" or the words of brahman. But it is only through determination and effort that this seeker can transcend the cycle of karma. However, if he indulges in selfish desires, he will stray from the spiritual path.

So therefore, it is incumbent upon all spiritual seekers to continuously strive towards attaining their spiritual goals, no matter what their history is. Shri Krishna speaks more about this determination and effort in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 45, Chapter 6

*prayatnaadyatamaanastu yogee samshuddhakilbishaha |
anekajanmasamsiddhastato yaati paraam gatim || 45 ||*

prayatnaat : diligently
yatamaanaha : who strives
tu : for
yogi : yogi
samshuddha : have been purified
kilbishaha : sins
anekajanma : over many births
samsiddhaaha : perfected
tataha : then
yaati : attains
paraam : supreme
gatim : state

For, that yogi who strives diligently, whose sins have been purified, perfected through many births, he then attains the supreme state.

Shri Krishna spoke earlier about the unfulfilled meditator who, having born into a prosperous family, finds himself pushed towards the spiritual path. Here, Shri Krishna talks about what happens to that person if he strives diligently. Such a person, if he puts in diligent effort, acquires spiritual prowess over many lives, purifies his sins, and ultimately attains the ultimate state of liberation.

Now, the plight of someone born into a prosperous family, yet is being pulled towards spirituality, is extremely interesting. On one hand, his family wealth has the potential for generating further selfish desires. On the other hand, the push towards the spiritual path has the potential of taking him towards liberation. What will decide his fate in regards to which side he ends up on? It is nothing but his effort and his diligence.

Therefore, Shri Krishna encourages Arjuna to relentlessly pursue this path. Arjuna is born into one of the most illustrious families of his time. But through the knowledge that he is receiving from Shri Krishna, he has the option of pursuing the spiritual path, but only if he incorporates this teaching into his life.

How exactly should he incorporate it into his life? That is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 46, Chapter 6

tapasvibhyodhiko yogi jnyaanibhyopi matodhikaha |
karmibhyashchaadhiko yogi tasmaadyogi bhavaarjuna || 46 ||

The yogi is greater than men of austerity, even greater than men of knowledge, and greater than men of action. Therefore, become a yogi, O Arjuna.

Shri Krishna begins to conclude the topic of meditation with this shloka. Having described the need for meditation, the definition of meditation, the process of meditation and the fate of a meditator, he now positions meditation as the ultimate means of attaining liberation. He says that the yogi, or the meditator, is superior to people who practice austerities, work selflessly or study the scriptures. And regardless of how much spiritual progress has been made in prior births, meditation is the only means of liberation. That is why he urges Arjuna to follow the path of meditation.

Here, Shri Krishna first lists three types of spiritual strivers: the *tapasvi* who practices austerities, the *karmayogi* who works selflessly, and the *jnyaani* who studies scriptures. We have come across the term *karma yogi* earlier, so let us look at the other two. The *tapasvi* is one who practices austerities in the form of minimizing exposure to the material world, such as fasting, donating wealth, keeping a vow of silence and so on. The *jnyaani* is one who is well versed in spiritual knowledge and continues to increase and disseminate this knowledge through books, satsangs or company of holy people, and discourses.

Although each of these practices has their place and moves the seeker forward in his spiritual path, they will not lead the seeker to his ultimate goal of liberation. Moreover, any of these practices will result in worldly gains as well. Shri Krishna advises Arjuna to not get "stuck" in any of these practices, but to gradually move towards meditation as the conclusion of his spiritual practice. Otherwise, there is a danger of the *tapasvi* harming himself through extreme austerity, the *karmayogi* not being able to detach himself from his actions, and the *jnyaani* gaining a ton of theoretical knowledge but not resulting in anything tangible.

So therefore, Shri Krishna urges Arjuna to follow the path of meditation as prescribed in this chapter. Specifically, this means developing

tapasvibhyaha : men of austerity
adhikaha : greater
yogi : yogi
jnyaanibhyaha : men of knowledge
api : even
mataha : opinion
adhikaha : greater
karmibhyaha : men of action
cha : and
adhikaha : greater
yogi : yogi
tasmaat : therefore
yogi : yogo
bhava : become
arjuna : O Arjuna

the vision of equanimity or "samyak darshana", where one sees oneself in all, and all in one's self. Shri Krishna concludes this chapter in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 47, Chapter 6

*yoginaamapi sarveshaam madgatenaantaraatmanaa |
shraddhaavaanbhajate yo maam sa me yuktatama mataha || 47 ||*

yoginaam : among the yogis
api : even
sarveshaam : among all
madgatena : one absorbed in me
antaraatmanaa : with mind
shraddhaavaan : endowed with faith
bhajate : worships
yaha : one who
maam : my
saha : he
me : my
yuktatamaha : most fit
mataha : opinion

Even among the yogis, endowed with faith, one who worships me with his mind fully absorbed in me, he is the most fit in my opinion.

As the chapter on meditation comes to a conclusion, we are left with an intriguing question. Like Arjuna, most of us have worldly duties and responsibilities. Even if we follow Shri Krishna's advice and take up meditation, we still have to perform actions in the material world. Till we reach a stage in life when meditation becomes our whole and soul, what do we do when we are not meditating to ensure that we continue our spiritual journey? In other words, how do we stay connected to the eternal essence when we are not meditating?

Shri Krishna says that we should develop the highest possible ideal to whom can dedicate all our worldly actions. But this ideal should not just be an intellectual ideal. Unless our hearts are filled with devotion towards this ideal, our attempts will be lacking. But we need to strike a balance. Emotion without intellect results in superstition. Intellect without emotion results in fanaticism. Both are ill-advised. We need a combination of the two. We also need the ideal to be tangible and real, not something that is extremely difficult for our mind to grasp.

Devotion is not exclusive to the spiritual path. Any worldly endeavour requires a combination of action, emotion and intellect. An entrepreneur not just knows what steps he has to take to build a company, but also gets a thrill doing it. A freedom fighter not just knows that freedom is right for their country, but also has reverence for the motherland. A mother loves her children more than she loves herself, but knows when it is time to scold them.

To that end, Shri Krishna urges us worship to the eternal essence in its universal form, which is nothing but Ishvara. We need to begin to develop reverence, and ultimately, whole-hearted devotion to Ishvara. One who develops such devotion to Ishvara that his entire life becomes service and worship of Ishvara, is considered as the foremost yogi or meditator by Shri Krishna.

Therefore, the concluding message of this chapter to Arjuna, and to us, is to develop devotion. Devotion will ensure that we remain connected to Ishvara. In order to do so, we first need to understand who is Ishvara, where is he located, what are his accomplishments, how can we access him and so on. Only then can we truly develop devotion. This shloka is the seed for the topic of the next six chapters, which is bhakti or devotion.

om tatsatiti shrimadbhagavadgitasu upanishadsu brahmavidyayaam yogashastre shrikrishnaarjunasamvade dhyaanayogonaamo shatodhyaahaha ||
6 ||

Summary Of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 6

Meditation, as described in this chapter, is an essential practice in any spiritual journey. Listening and reading scriptures comprises "shra-vanam", resolving doubts is "mananam", and establishing oneself in the knowledge of the eternal essence is "nidhidhyaasana" or internalization. Meditation is the means to internalizing knowledge of the eternal essence.

Shri Krishna gives an exhaustive coverage of meditation in this chapter. The key point for us is to understand the vision of a meditator. The meditator views all objects, people and situations with equanimity. He does not see them as different than himself. In other words, he "sees his self in all beings, and all beings in his self". He can see his self as brahman, the formless aspect of the eternal essence, or as Ishvara, the form-oriented aspect.

In preparing for meditation, Shri Krishna urges us to first renounce selfish desires through karma yoga. Unless the mind is purified of selfish desires for the most part, it will not be able to meditate properly. It is only through the intellect, our higher self, that can control the mind, our lower self. Furthermore, we should lead a moderate lifestyle, in other word not go overboard in eating, sleeping and indulging in sense objects. The end result of all this preparation is a gradual withdrawal or "uparati" from the outside world, leading to the mind settling in the eternal essence, conveyed by the message "the self settling into the self".

Next, Shri Krishna covers the technique of meditation. He advises us to select a place that is quiet, clean and pure. He also suggests using a seat that is well insulated, on which we are advised to sit with our eyes focused on one spot, and with our spine held erect. Shri Krishna further instructs us to focus our attention on one thought, and try not to let the mind waver, just like an unwavering candle flame. The object of meditation should be something that we hold as supreme and dear. It could be an image of a deity or of the guru. The untrained mind will always try to wander in different directions, but we should use the power of our intellect, our higher self, to bring the mind back to one thought.

Finally, Shri Krishna praises the meditator by elevating his status higher than any other kind of seeker. He says that the meditator attains supreme joy, peace and bliss. He is always protected against the heaviest of sorrows because he resides in Ishvara. Even if the ultimate goal

of meditation is not realized in this birth, the effort put forth will be carried over into the next birth. But the most supreme meditator is one who is Ishvara's devotee. Who is Ishvara in reality? That is covered in the next six chapters.



Jnyaana Vijnyaana Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 7**Shri Bhagavaan uvaacha:**mayyasaktamanaaha paartha yogam yunjanmadaashrayaha |
asamshayam samagram maam yathaa jnyaasyasi tachchrunu || 1 ||*

mayi : to me
 aasaktamanaaha : mind attached
 paartha : O Paartha
 yogam : yoga
 yunjan : striving
 madaashrayaha : taking refuge in me
 asamshayam : without doubt
 samagram : completely
 maam : my
 yathaa : by which
 jnyaasyasi : knows
 tat : that
 shrunu : listen

Shri Bhagavaan said:With mind attached to me, O Paartha, striving in yoga, taking refuge in me, without doubt, by which you will know me completely, listen to that.

Before we proceed to the seventh chapter, let's recap what we have seen so far. Arjuna, overcome with sorrow in the battlefield, pleaded to Shri Krishna to give him proper guidance. Shri Krishna proceeded to give him the teaching of the eternal essence, which was the primary topic of the second chapter.

The first step in gaining this supreme knowledge is to purify the mind of selfish desires through karmayoga, which was the topic of the third and fourth chapters. As our desires slowly get purified, karmayoga morphs into karma sanyaasa, where our activities reduce to the bare minimum. The final step is the culmination of karmayoga into dhyana yoga or meditation. In this manner, the first six chapters of the Gita focus on the individual and self effort.

We saw in the last chapter that Shri Krishna wanted us to meditate upon him as Ishvara. But for the most part, we do not know what Ishvara is, what is his role in the world, how do we access him and so on. Furthermore, if Ishvara truly represents the infinite eternal essence, how can the finite mind meditate on him? Chapters seven through twelve explain this technique. They reveal to us the nature of Ishvara as creator and controller of this universe. And just like we had to put forth effort to purify our mind in the prior six chapter, we need to apply a more demanding approach to understand Ishvara. It is the effort of surrender to Ishvara with bhakti or devotion.

Now, Shri Krishna introduces the seventh chapter with a powerful message. He says that he will reveal that by which we can come to know of Ishvara's true nature completely and without any doubts. This will require us to develop attachment towards him, and to seek refuge in him.

Firstly, Shri Krishna wants us to understand his true nature "sama-

gram" or completely, and without any doubts. For many of us, our image of Ishvara is based upon pictures we have seen in books or on television of Lord Narayana sleeping on the serpent, or of Shri Krishna playing in Vrindaavan. Shri Krishna says that there is nothing wrong with these images, but that is not the full story. He wants to reveal himself in such a manner to us that we will get a complete and comprehensive understanding of his real nature.

In the process of understanding Ishvara's true nature, we will begin to develop a strong attachment towards him and become intent on him, indicated by the words "mai aasakta". When we begin to develop an attachment to a higher ideal, the lower attachments to material things will automatically drop. There is no need for anything else as a source of joy when one develops an affinity for Ishvara.

Furthermore, we will seek his "aashraya", which means support. Usually, when we are in distress, we take the support of our job, our wealth, our body, our friends and so on. But, none of these can guarantee their support. They could pull out any any minute, they are unreliable. As we begin to develop devotion towards Ishvara, we will realize that he is the only permanent support available. We will begin to rely on him solely, rather than on any other source of support.

So therefore, Shri Krishna asks Arjuna to pay attention to this message, as it is not going to be easy for everyone to develop such a connection to Ishvara. But this is the only way by which we can know Ishvara in his entirety. Shri Krishna speaks more about the nature of this knowledge in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 7

*jnyaanam teham savijnyaanamidam vakshyaamyasheshataha |
yajnyaatvaa neha bhooyonyajnyaatavyamavashishyate || 2 ||*

Knowledge with wisdom, I shall tell you this completely, having known that, there will be nothing else left to know.

Shri Krishna had begun a new topic in this chapter, which is the technique by which we can know him as Ishvara in his entirety. Here, Shri Krishna says that he will reveal not just this knowledge, but also impart us wisdom. The wisdom is such that once we know it, there will be nothing else remaining to be known.

We spend our lives acquiring knowledge about new things. With the pace of change in the world today, we would not be able to know everything, even if we were to spend thousands of lifetimes gaining PhDs in all the sciences, arts, humanities and so on. Shri Krishna says that the wisdom or "vijnyaana" that he is going to impart will be such that once we know it, nothing else will remain to be known.

Let us see how this will be possible. We had seen the example of a goldsmith earlier who is not fascinated by the artwork or shape of the gold bangles, bracelets, necklaces and other ornaments that he comes across. All he cares about is the quantity of gold that is in each ornament. In other words, because he knows the cause as gold, he knows that the effect as the ornament, may differ in shape, but is gold in its essence. Knowledge is the shape of the different ornaments, wisdom is knowledge of their essential nature.

What will happen once I know this? Shri Krishna says that having known this, nothing else will remain to be known. It will be knowledge that is all inclusive. Also, it is knowledge that makes up complete, unlike worldly knowledge that reveals further holes as we study it more.

But if this is the case, why doesn't everyone pursue this knowledge? This is taken up next.

jnyaanam : knowledge
te : to you
aham : I shall
savijnyaanam : with wisdom
idam : this
vakshyaami : I will tell
asheshataha : completely
yat : that which
jnyaatvaa : having known
na : not
iha : this
bhooyaha : again
anyat : anything else
jnyaatavyam : to be known
avashishyate : left

Notes

1. The second half of the shloka is taken from the Mundaka Upanishad where the question is asked 'Tell me that knowledge, knowing which, nothing else will remain to be known.'

Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 7

*manushyaanaam sahareshu kashchidyatati sidhaye |
yatataamapi siddhaanaam kaschinmaam vetti tattvataha || 3 ||*

Among thousands of people, perhaps one strives for success. Among those successful strivers, perhaps only one knows me in essence.

manushyaanaam : among people
sahastreshu : thousands
kashchit : perhaps one
yatati : strives
sidhaye : success
yatataam : among those strivers
api : only
siddhaanaam : successful
kaschit : perhaps one
maam : me
veti : knows
tattvataha : in essence

Shri Krishna introduced this chapter by saying that he will reveal his true nature to Arjuna, which comprises both knowledge and wisdom. He also said that by knowing this, nothing else will remain to be known. Given the powerful nature of this knowledge, one would hope that everyone would seek this knowledge rather than running after new sources of knowledge everyday. But this is not the case. Here, he says that those who seek this knowledge are extremely rare in this world.

Let us look at the language used in the shloka. The word "sahasra" literally means thousands, but used in this context, it means innumerable or an extremely large quantity. So the shloka then reads: out of innumerable people, only one strives for success in liberation. Out of those few strivers, only one knows Shri Krishna in his essence.

Here, we can raise a doubt and say: what about the millions of people who go to the temple everyday? They worship Ishvara in his numerous forms. Many people observe fasts. Many people have a little temple in their homes. Many people conduct religious ceremonies where they donate food and other items. So how can it be said that only few people know Ishvara?

This doubt can be answered by looking at the last part of the shloka where Shri Krishna says that he has to be known in his essential nature. Most of the people mentioned earlier worship Ishvara, but they tend to have a partial understanding of what Ishvara really is. That is why Shri Krishna devoted almost a third of the Gita in describing his essential nature.

Having introduced the topic of Ishvara, Shri Krishna begins the main portion in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 7

*bhoomiraaponalo vayuhu kham mano buddhireva cha |
ahankaara iteeyam me bhinnaa prakritirashtadhaa || 4 ||*

bhoomihi : earth
aapaha : water
analaha : fire
vayuhu : wind
kham : space
manaha : mind
buddhihi : intellect
eva : along with
cha : and
ahankaaraha : ego
iti : in this manner
iyam : this
me : my
bhinnaa : differentiated
prakritihi : nature
ashtadhaa : eight-fold

Earth, water, fire, wind and space, along with mind, ego and intellect, in this manner, this is my eight-fold differentiated nature.

Shri Krishna, having promised Arjuna that he will reveal his true essence, begins to do so in this shloka. He says that five primordial elements, as well as mind, ego and intellect, comprise his prakriti or nature.

Earth, water, fire, wind and space here do not mean tangible physical elements that we can perceive through our senses. They refer to the qualities of the physical elements. For example, water here refers to the quality of liquids that enable them to flow. Fire refers to the quality of a flame to generate light and heat. When these elements combine with each other, they have the potential to create every object in this universe. In other words, Shri Krishna says that the building blocks of the universe are nothing but his manifestation.

What is the implication here? For many of us that have a set image of Ishvara as a certain deity, this is a whole new way of understanding. It means that Ishvara is within our grasp 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All of the objects, situations and people that we interact with are made up of these elements.

This means that if we realize that everything comes from Ishvara, then we should not have room for any negative emotions such as jealousy, anger etc. Why? When we know that everything is created and owned by Ishvara, we do not get agitated if our neighbour buys a bigger car or gets a better job. We see everything as ultimately belonging to Ishvara, so it does not matter who temporarily claims it as his or hers.

Now, having discussed the five elements, let us take up the other three through an illustration. In the morning, just before we are about to wake up, our mind is in an unmanifest state. We are not aware of anything. As we begin to get up, the first thought that comes to mind is subject awareness, i.e. "I am so-and-so". Soon after, we begin thinking that "I am so-and-so in this bedroom and it is 7 am now". The mind goes from unmanifest, to the ego (I am), to awareness of objects.

The creation of the universe per the Saamkhya school of philosophy follows these three stages as well. The universe originally lies in an unmanifest state. The first manifestation or transformation in this state is the ego-principle, which is also known as self-assertion or the "I-principle". It creates the notion of the subject and object, or of the experiencer and experienced. Finally, this ego-principle learns how to manifest itself in terms of objects, which is known as the cosmic mind. These three states - unmanifest, ego-principle and cosmic mind are denoted in the shloka as mind, ego and intellect.

The cosmic mind then begins to manifest itself from the most intangible elements to the most tangible ones, step by step. The first element produced is space, which is invisible. Next is air, which we cannot see but can infer from its effects. Next is fire, which we can see but not touch. This is followed by water, which we can see and touch. Finally, earth is produced which is the most tangible element of all. If you reverse the order of elements given in this shloka, it exactly follows the doctrine of creation in Saamkhya.

So, if we take all of these 8 factors into account, we realize that all the material aspects of the universe is Ishvara. Ishvara has not created this world like a sculptor creates statues out of clay. He has created the world out of himself. It is like the spider that creates the web out of himself, like the Mundaka Upanishad says.

The entire world of experience is Ishvara. But what about the experiencer himself? This is taken up in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 7

*apareyamitastvanyaam prakritim viddhi me paraam |
jeevabhootam mahaabaaho yayedam dhaaryate jagat || 5 ||*

But, know this lower (nature as) different than my life-giving higher nature, O mighty-armed, by which this universe is upheld.

In the previous shloka, Shri Krishna described his nature that was made up of 8 factors: 5 physical elements and 3 subtle elements. Now, he says that those 8 factors comprise the lower, or inferior, type of nature. It is different than the higher or superior nature, that is the life force of the universe. It functions as a force that holds the universe together.

A house is built out of bricks, wood, iron rods and so on. But the building blocks by themselves do not make a house. There has to be an integrating or unifying principle in the form of cement that holds the house together. Shri Krishna says that his higher nature is the cohesive force that upholds the universe. By using the word "jeeva-bhootam", he is saying that he becomes the universal jeeva or being that makes the universe as a single entity rather than a disjointed chaotic mess.

Furthermore, it is this higher nature that becomes the experiencer of the entire universe as a subject. What does the word "subject" mean? Whenever we see something, two things are required: the subject (one who sees) and the object (that which is seen by the subject). If I see a sofa, then I am the subject, and the sofa is the object. The sofa can never become the subject because it is an inert object. Only conscious entities can become subjects. There is a spark in us, a conscious principle, that enables us to see, hear, touch, taste and smell, in other words, to become a subject.

Throughout our life, we seek knowledge about the world through several sources. But those studies only cover the world of objects, which is indicated here by the term "lower nature". Only spirituality provides us knowledge about the subject, which is nothing but our own self.

So then, why are we talking about subject and object here? It is because Shri Krishna's lower nature creates the world of objects, and his higher nature creates the world of subjects. When the universe originated, it split, as it were, into two aspects: the lower and the higher

aparaa : lower
iyam : this
itaha : than
tu : but
anyaam : different
prakritim : nature
viddhi : know
me : my
paraam : higher
jeevabhootam : life-giving
mahaabaaho : O mighty-armed
yayaa : by which
idam : this
dhaaryate : upheld
jagat : universe

nature. The lower nature or prakriti is what we generally describe as the universe that we can see with our eyes and with our telescopes, in both its visible and invisible aspects.

That was the lower nature. The higher nature further split itself into subsets. Each subset became a jeeva, which is the conscious principle operating within each of us. That jeeva principle within us makes us a subject, an experiencer.

Therefore, with these two shlokas, Shri Krishna has covered everything in the world - subject and object, inert and conscious, experiencer and experienced, building blocks and unifying force. But what is common between them? This is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 6, Chapter 7

etadyoneeni bhootaani sarvaaneetyupadhaaraya |
aham kritsnasya jagataha prabhavaha pralayastathaa || 6 ||

Both these are the wombs of all beings, understand this. I am the source as well as the dissolution of the entire universe.

etat : both these
 yoneeni : wombs
 bhootaani : beings
 sarvaani : all
 iti : this
 upadhaaraya : understand
 aham : I
 kritsnasya : entire
 jagataha : universe
 prabhavaha : source
 pralayaha : dissolution
 tathaa : as well as

Having described both his lower and higher nature, Shri Krishna says both those natures combine to create everything in this universe. This creation is described poetically as the "womb" from which everything originates. The lower nature and higher nature are both needed to create this universe. Furthermore, everything that is created is also sustained and ultimately dissolved into Ishvara. In other words, Ishvara creates, maintains and dissolves the entire universe.

Let us now understand the deeper meaning of this shloka. But before we proceed, let us first understand what is meant by cause and effect. When we hold a piece of cloth, what do we see? We see its color, its texture, its shape and so on. But if were to go back in time, we would see that cloth come from cotton threads, which came from a cotton plant, which came from a cotton seed, which at some point came from the earth. So the cause of the cloth was the earth, and the effect is the cloth.

Unfortunately, our minds have been conditioned to focus on the effect, and not on the cause. We see the cloth and its attributes, but do not even think about the cause, because that requires our intellect to come into the picture. Most economic, social and political movements tend to fail because they only focus on the symptoms and not the cause. For example, imprisoning small-time drug dealers does not stop the drug trade, because the demand for drugs will push some other person into dealing drugs.

Now let us look at this shloka from the standpoint of cause and effect. If we were to trace the ultimate cause of anything in this universe, it eventually comes back to Ishvara's lower and higher natures. Therefore, Shri Krishna is asserting the fact that Ishvara is everywhere. Even though our eyes cannot see the form of a deity in front of us, our intellect will tell us that the ultimate cause is Ishvara. Our eyes give us jnyaanam or knowledge of the effect, our intellect provides us with vijnyaanam, which is the vision of the cause.

In mythology, this intellectual vision is depicted as the "third eye" of Lord Shiva that turns everything into ashes. This eye is a metaphor for developing equanimity of vision. If we learn to behold Ishvara as the cause of every object that we see, we will automatically begin to see Ishvara everywhere. So therefore, this shloka urges us to exercise our intellect so that we can see Ishvara everywhere.

Seeing Ishvara in everything is a huge milestone in the spiritual path. What is the next milestone?

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 7

*mataha parataram naanyatkinchidasti dhananjaya |
mayi sarvamidam protam sootre maniganaa iva || 7 ||*

mataha : my
parataram : beyond
na : no
anyat : none other
kinchit : even a little
asti : is
dhananjaya : O Dhananjaya
mayi : in me
sarvam : all
idam : this
protam : pervaded
sootre : on a string
maniganaaha : beads
iva : like

Beyond me there is none other, not even a little. Like beads are pervaded by string, all this is in me.

In this chapter, Shri Krishna urges us to see Ishvara as the ultimate cause of everything in this universe. To illustrate this point, he poetically portrayed Ishvara as the womb or the seed of everything, enabling us to develop the vision by which we can see Ishvara in everything. In this shloka, he makes us leap to a whole new level of vision by which we can not just see Ishvara in everything, but see everything in Ishvara.

Shri Krishna addresses Arjuna as the dhananjaya, the conquerer of wealth, and makes a bold statement. He says that other than Ishvara, there is nothing in this universe. This means Ishvara alone exists in the universe. Other than him, there is nothing else. Through a process that will be taken up in the next topic, we see this universe of names and forms instead of Ishvara.

The shloka provides a necklace as an illustration. This necklace comprises a string and a series of knots in the string, which appear as beads. So, if we were to view this necklace, we would register it as a string and beads. But our intellect would tell us that it is nothing but the string with some modifications in the form of beads.

Similarly, Shri Krishna says that Ishvara pervades the entire universe just like this string pervades the entire necklace. When we apply our intellect, the necklace and the beads disappear, as it were, and only the string remains. Each bead contains the string, but the string contains all the beads. In other words, the string is all-pervading. With the knowledge that Shri Krishna imparts in this chapter, we should strive for piercing through the world of names and forms and only seeing Ishvara.

Is there a practical advantage to viewing the world in this manner? If we can begin to develop this vision, then all our so-called problems with objects, people and situations will disappear, because we will realize that the ultimate cause of everything is Ishvara. If everything is

Ishvara, there is no concept of any duality, including joy or sorrow. It is all Ishvara.

Shri Krishna understands that such a vision is hard to develop. Our vision is used to seeing the tangible and not the intangible. So in order to help us in this path, he gives us some pointers that will help us see his glories or vibhootis.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 7

*rasohamapsu kaunteya prabhaasmi shashisooryayoho |
pranavaha sarvavedeshu shabdaha khe paurusham nrishu || 8 ||*

I am the taste in water, O Kaunteya. I am the light of the sun and moon, Om in all the Vedas, sound in space, valour in men.

rasaha : taste
aham : I
apsu : in water
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
prabhaa : light
asmi : I am
shashihi : moon
sooryayoho : sun
pranavaha : Om
sarvavedeshu : in all the Vedas
shabdaha : sound
khe : in space
paurusham : valour
nrishu : in men

We are exploring the topic of bhakti yoga in this chapter, where we learn to channel our thoughts towards a single ideal, which is Ishvara. Ishvara is in everything, and everything is in Ishvara - these statements were proclaimed by Shri Krishna previously. Even if we intellectually understand Ishvara as the ultimate cause, our senses do not literally "see" Ishvara. So then, how do we learn to remember Ishvara at all times?

Shri Krishna helps us in this regard by giving us a list of Ishvara's vibhootis or glories. He recognizes that our mind tends to see wonder and glory in some aspects of the universe. If we can train ourselves to remember Ishvara whenever we see his glories, it will help us advance towards our goal of learning to see Ishvara everywhere.

The first example of Ishvara's vibooti is the taste in water. Water is an important part of everyone's life. Over 60 pct of our body is made up of water. Shri Krishna says that Ishvara is the taste or essence of water. In other words, Ishvara is what makes water behave like water. So whenever we have a glass of water when we are extremely thirsty, it is Ishvara that is refreshing us. This is a wonderful meditation that we can practice.

Similarly, whenever we are dazzled by the brilliance of the sun, or the soothing light of the moon, we should remember that it is Ishvara that is providing the brightness or the effulgence. Whenever we hear a sound, we should know that it is Ishvara that provides the ability for sound to travel through air. Moreover, when we read stories about people who selflessly protect their country or their fellow human beings, we should remember that it is Ishvara that provides valour to them.

Finally, Shri Krishna says that Ishvara represents the word "Om" among the Vedas. Om takes a special place in the Vedas. It symbolically represents the eternal essence out of which this entire universe is created.

Meditation on the word "Om" is considered one of the highest meditations possible.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 9, Chapter 7

*punyo gandhaha prithvyaam cha tejjashchaasmi vibhaavasau |
jeevanam sarvabhooteshu tapashchaasmi tapasvishu || 9 ||*

I am the pleasant fragrance in earth and the brightness in fire. I am the life-force in all beings, and the austerity in the austere.

Earlier, Shri Krishna said that he is the taste in water, the light in the sun and moon, Om in the Vedas, sound in space, and valour in men. He now continues to list his glories or vibhootis in this shloka.

No fragrance can be compared to that which arises from the earth after the first shower in the monsoon season in India. You have to experience it yourself. Shri Krishna says that whenever we smell that pleasant fragrance, we should know that it is Ishvara in the form of that fragrance. Furthermore, Shri Shankaraachaarya in his commentary goes on to say that any fragrance is a product of prakriti or nature, and any odour is a product of ignorance or avidya.

Next, if we are asked to imagine that entity which contains the hottest fire, we immediately think of the sun. Even if we intellectually know that there are other stars that are much larger than the sun, we still think of the sun as the brightest and the hottest entity. Shri Krishna says that Ishvara is the heat or brilliance in fire everywhere, including the sun and the stars. In other words, the brilliance of the sun is darkness compared to the brilliance of Ishvara.

We intuitively know that there is a life force or life principle that distinguishes inert objects from plants, animals and humans. Our heart becomes joyful when we see an abundance of this life force, especially in children. Shri Krishna says that it is Ishvara that is the life force or life principle present in all plants, animals and human beings.

Finally, Shri Krishna brings up the topic of tapas or austerity. What is tapas? It is the energy that builds up in our body when we check the movement of our senses and our mind. We notice that whenever we over-indulge in eating, drinking, watching too much TV or partying, we feel drained of all our energy. Conversely, when we control our senses and our mind, we will find an increase in our energy levels. This energy is tapas, and Shri Krishna says that this tapas is Ishvara.

punyaha : pleasant
gandhaha : fragrance
prithvyaam : in the earth
cha : and
tejjaha : brightness
cha : and
asmi : I am
vibhaavasau : in fire
jeevanam : life force
sarva : all
bhooteshu : in beings
tapaha : austerity
cha : and
asmi : I am
tapasvishu : austere

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 7

*beejam maam sarvabhootaanaam viddhi paartha sanaatanam |
buddhirbuddhimataamasmi tejastejasvinaamaham || 10 ||*

Know me as the eternal seed of all beings, O Paartha. I am the intellect of the intelligent, the radiance of the illustrious.

beejam : seed
maam : me
sarvabhootaanaam : of all beings
viddhi : know
paartha : O Paartha
sanaatanam : eternal
buddhihi : intellect
buddhimataam : of the intelligent
asmi : I am
tejas : radiance
tejasvinaam: of the illustrious
aham : I am

Previously, Shri Krishna spoke about seeing Ishvara as earthly fragrance, brilliance in fire, life in beings and austerity in the austere. He continues to give a list of his glories in this shloka, beginning with the statement that he is the eternal seed of all beings. He also addresses Arjuna as Paartha, descendent of King Prithu.

Earlier, Shri Krishna asserted that Ishvara is the cause of everything in the universe. So then, why is he seemingly repeating himself by the statement "I am the eternal seed"? It is to ensure that we gain the correct understanding.

Normally, when any tree grows out of a seed, the seed ceases to exist. In the case of Ishvara, however, the seed is eternal. In other words, the seed is changeless, but the entire content of the universe lies in an unmanifest form in this seed. It manifests itself at various points in the universe's life span, not just at the beginning. So therefore, we need to learn to recognize the eternal seed and not get carried away or stuck in the level of names and forms.

Next, Shri Krishna urges us to recognize Ishvara in intelligence. We admire intelligent people for their ability to think clearly about complex issues without getting swayed by noise. How is their way of thinking different? A glass of clear water lets through more light than a glass of water that is agitated or clouded by dirt. Similarly, an intelligent person's mind is less dominated by the sway of emotion, and therefore enables the brilliance of Ishvara to shine through the intellect unhindered. In this manner, Ishvara becomes the intelligence of the intelligent.

Finally, Shri Krishna adds tejas or radiance to his list of vibhootis. This radiance manifests in us when when we are in good physical and mental health, when we have slept well, when we are fit. Also, when someone had earned a lot of wealth through self effort, or has performed selfless service, they also have a certain kind of glow. Shri

Krishna says that it is Ishvara manifesting in these illustrious individuals in the form of tejas or radiance.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 7

*balam baalvataam chaaham kaamaraagaavivarjitam |
dharmaaviruddho bhooteshu kaamosmi bharatarshabha || 11 ||*

**I am strength in the strong that is free from desire and attachment,
and I am desire in beings that is consistent with duty, O scion of the
Bharataas.**

balam : strength
baalvataam : in the strong
cha : and
aham : I am
kaama : desire
raaga : attachment
vivarjitam : free from
dharma : duty
aviruddhaha : consistent with
bhooteshu : beings
kaamaha : desire
asmi : I am
bharatarshabha : O scion of the Bharatas

Shri Krishna further adds to the list of Ishvara's vibhootis in this shloka. He says that Ishvara is the strength that is free of selfishness and attachment, and the desire that is selfless.

What exactly are desire and attachment? Desire is craving for something that we do not have, and attachment is holding on to something that we already have. Selfish actions generate attachment which binds us to the material world. The more selfishly we act, the further we move away from Ishvara acting through us. Only when we act selflessly does Ishvara act through us. Shri Krishna says that Ishvara is that desire which is not selfish, or which is consistent with one's duty.

Now, when we begin to act in a selfless manner, we develop an inner strength. Conversely, whenever we act out of selfish desire and attachment, we become weak. In the Mahabharata, the Pandavaas knew that they could not target Drona directly because he was too powerful. Instead, they targeted someone whom he was deeply attached to - his son Ashwatthaamaa. The more we turn towards Ishvara, the less we get attached to people and worldly objects.

It is our choice whether we act selfishly for our personal gains, or selflessly with a view to benefit a higher ideal. Any action that harmonizes or integrates brings with it the power of the entire universe. Therefore, Shri Krishna says that he is the strength that is free from selfish desire and attachment.

Shri Krishna concludes the topic of his vibhootis with this shloka. A much more in-depth discussion on this topic is found in chapter ten of the Gita.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 7

*ye chaiva saatvikaa bhaavaa rajasaastaamasashcha ye |
matta evati taanviddhi na toaham teshu te mayi || 12 ||*

And indeed, all saatvik qualities, and all raajasic and taamsic qualities, know those to be only from me. Know that I am not in them, but they are in me.

Shri Krishna began this chapter by indicating that Ishvara is the essence of everything. He also provided a short list containing tangible examples of his glories, which he concluded in the previous shloka. In this shloka, he summarizes this point by saying that the three fundamental aspects of prakriti or nature arise from Ishvara, but are subservient to Ishvara.

Sattva, rajas and tamas are the three aspects of prakriti or nature. A more detailed explanation of these three gunaas or aspects is provided in the 18th chapter. At the internal level, these aspects are the moods of our mind. A taamasic mind is dull, a raajasic mind is active and a saatvic mind is serene. Moreover, a saatvic object or thought is tied to knowledge, a raajasic object or thought is tied to activity and a taamasic thought or object is tied to ignorance, sloth or procrastination.

We see all these three aspects in our personality. The body is taamasic. It likes to be in stasis, it does not like to move. A lot of energy is required to move our bodies. Our limbs and our praanas or physiological processes are raajasic because they embody action and movement. Our mind and intellect are saatvic because they embody knowledge. Later in the Gita, Shri Krishna will classify everything, including desire and faith, into these three classifications.

Now, all three aspects of prakriti cannot exist by themselves. Nothing can exist without a base or a support. Shri Krishna says that it is Ishvara who provides existence to these three aspects of prakriti. However, he qualifies that statement by pointing out that they are in Ishvara, but Ishvara is not in them. In other words, Ishvara can exist without the gunaas, but the gunaas cannot exist without Ishvara because they need his support.

What is the implication of this statement? Every object, person or situation that we encounter in this universe is comprised of a permu-

ye : all
cha : and
eva : indeed
saatvikaaha : saatvik
bhaavaaha : qualities
rajasaaha : raajasic
taamasaha : taamasic
cha : and
ye : all
mattaha : from me
eva: only
iti : this
taan : those
viddhi : know
na : not
tu : but
aham : I am
teshu : in them
te : they
mayi : are in me

tation of the three gunaas. All three gunaas are supported by Ishvara. Therefore, Ishvara is everywhere, behind every object, person and situation in this universe.

So then, what prevents us from knowing Ishvara? Shri Krishna covers this topic next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 7

*tribhiringunamayairbhaavairebhihi sarvamidam jagat |
mohitam naabhijaanaati maamebhyaha paramavyayam || 13 ||*

This entire universe, deluded by these three modes in the form of gunaas, does not know me to be beyond these (gunaas) and imperishable.

tribhihi : three
gunamaiyaihai : in the form of gunaas
bhaavaihi : modes
ebhihi : these
sarvam : entire
idam : this
jagat : universe
mohitam : deluded by
na : do not
abhijaanaati : know me
maam : me
param : beyond
avyayam : imperishable

So far in this chapter, Shri Krishna indicated that Ishvara is the ultimate cause, that he pervades everything, the entire universe is a play of the three gunaas, and that he supports all the three gunaas but they do not impact him. In theory, if we know this, then we should be a hundred percent clear about the true nature of Ishvara, which is the objective of this chapter. But there is still more to come. Why is that? It is because there is something in these three gunaas or aspects of nature that prevents us from accessing Ishvara.

Shri Krishna says that most people are deluded or confused about the true nature of Ishvara due to the overpowering effect of the three gunaas. This overpowering effect is our tendency to get carried away by name and form. It is our tendency to judge a book by its cover. We are so dazzled by the diversity of various forms of gold jewellery (the effect) that we fail to recognize that everything is ultimately gold (the cause).

Each gunaa or mode of nature has the ability to overpower us. Imagine a vendor at a vegetable market that has to haggle with his customers in order to turn a profit. A taamasic vendor can resort to any tactic including fraud to dupe unsuspecting customers, and potentially get caught doing so. A raajasac vendor can use fair, but aggressive negotiating tactics with even the shrewdest of his customers, eventually shrinking his customer base to zero. Now, we typically think that a saatvic vendor would follow the correct strategy, but this is not the case. Even saatva can overpower the vendor if he always gives in to the customer's negotiations and goes into a loss.

Now, let us see what exactly happened with each of the vendors. The taamasic vendor could only see the most tangible thing in front of him - the crisp note that he can keep in his pocket as soon as the sale is made. He did not have the ability to think one step beyond the note, that he would get caught for fraud.

The raajasic vendor thought one step ahead and knew that he should not resort to anything illegal. But by always focusing on his personal gain, he missed the big picture in that he would eventually lose all his customers.

The saatvic vendor understood the big picture to some extent. But he forgot that he had to support a family at home, and therefore had to strike the right balance of maximizing his profit and making the customer happy.

So what does all this have to do with Ishvara? All three vendors were deluded or overpowered by gunaas. This is because our mind and senses is made up of the very "stuff" of the gunaas, as we saw in a previous shloka in chapter 3. They run after prakriti or nature which is also made up of the gunaas. We are helpless because our senses and our mind is wired to focus on names and forms, and not the underlying essence or cause. We get so carried away by names and forms that we cannot comprehend that Ishvara who is beyond any name and form, any attribute or modification.

So then, how do we develop this ability to pierce through the three gunaas and understand the real nature of Ishvara? Shri Krishna tackles this topic next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 7

*daivee hyoshaa gunamayee mama maayaa duratyayaa |
maameva ye prapadyante maayaametaam taranti te || 14 ||*

**For this, my divine maaya, comprised of the gunaas, is hard to cross.
Only they who seek my refuge, cross over my maaya.**

daivee : divine
hi : for
eshaa : this
gunamayee : of the gunaas
mama : my
maayaa : maayaa
duratyayaa : hard to cross
maam : my
eva : only
ye : those
prapadyante : seeks my refuge
maayaam : maaya
etaam : this
taranti : crosses over
te : they

At this point in the seventh chapter, Shri Krishna has framed an interesting problem for us. If our mind with its senses is attracted to sense objects because of the play of the three gunaas, and if Ishvara is beyond the three gunaas, we need to somehow pierce through gunaas to contact Ishvara. If we cannot do it with our mind with its sense organs, how do we do it? We need some additional help. Shri Krishna says that the only solution is to surrender to Ishvara.

First, let us understand what exactly is preventing us from contacting Ishvara. Shri Krishna says that there is something called maaya is the barrier between us and Ishvara. What exactly is this maaya? It is nothing special, it is the 3 gunaas that saw in the previous shloka. Where is this maaya located? Not too far away. It is in our mind, and we can see its effect daily. Just when we think we are studying Gita and are immune to its effect, we suddenly get an angry thought about a friend or a co-worker. That is maaya. Now if maaya is the moat that blocks access to Ishvara, how do we cross it?

Shri Krishna says that in order to cross over maaya, we have to surrender to Ishvara completely. This type of complete surrender is indicated by the word "prapadyante" in the shloka. It literally means falling down at someone's feet. To visualize it, imagine that the devotee is holding onto Ishvara's feet, and also keeping one hand under Ishvara's feet. With this arrangement, the devotee will not run away from Ishvara, and Ishvara will also not run away from the devotee.

Now, what does surrender mean in practice? As long as we assert ourselves physically, emotionally and intellectually, as long as we emphasize our individuality and assert our ego, we will strengthen maaya. So therefore, we need to de-emphasize our individuality and strengthen our devotion to Ishvara. When we surrender ourselves to Ishvara, we give up the notion that "I do everything" or "I own everything". It is all Ishvara's maaya. By distancing ourselves from maaya, we get closer to Ishvara.

Moreover, Shri Krishna says that maaya is divine, which means that it is supported by Ishvara but it has reality on its own. In our lives, however, we still rely on maaya for support. We rely on our savings, friends, family, job, education and so on as our refuge if times get tough. But all this is still the product of maaya. Once we shift our thinking that maaya cannot be a support, we will rely on the cause of maaya for support instead of maaya. And that cause is Ishvara. We can only enjoy bungee jumping when we have a strong rope and support. Similarly, we can enjoy the play of maaya if we have tethered ourselves to Ishvara.

How should we practice this daily? We should continue performing our duties as we saw in the previous chapters. What we should change, however, is our attitude. Whenever we start giving importance worldly things including people, objects and situations, we should train ourselves to shift our attention to Ishvara who is behind everything. But we should not use this to justify all our wrongdoings. As we saw in a previous chapter, prakriti or nature is a self-regulating system. If we do something that is against the laws of nature, it will come back to us as a punishment.

So then, having understood this, why do people not seek Ishvara?

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 7

*na maam dushkritino moodhaahaa prapadyante naraadhamaahaa |
maayayaapahyatajanyaanaa aasuram bhaavamaashritaahaa || 15 ||*

Wretched and deluded evildoers do not seek my refuge. Those whose wisdom has been abducted by maaya take support of devilish tendencies.

na : do not
maam : my
dushkritinaha : evildoers
moodhaahaa : deluded
prapadyante : seek refuge
naraadhamaahaa : wretched
maayayaa : through maayaa
apahyatajanyaanaa : those whose wisdom has been abducted
aasuram : devilish
bhaavam : tendencies
aashritaahaa : take support

Previously, Shri Krishna said that only those who take the refuge of Ishvara can cross over maaya. But, many people fail to follow this instruction. Instead, their wisdom is usurped by maaya. Maaya veils Ishvara, causing people to think that they don't have to associate with Ishvara. Shri Krishna says that these people are not just deluded or ignorant, they are wretched, they are evil doers and are the lowest among human beings.

First of all, there are people who are somewhat deluded by maaya. They spend their lives running after material objects and possessions because they find joy in doing so. But they do so without causing any harm to anybody. Next, there are people who are even more deluded, who don't hesitate to break the law in their pursuit of material objects. Finally, there are the worst kind of people who will resort to taking another's life for their material fulfillment.

Having thus categorized people who are deluded by maaya, Shri Krishna calls their nature "aasuri" or devilish. Our goal should not to show up in this category. So then, what kind of people seek out Ishvara? This is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 7

*chaturvidhaa bhajante maam janaaha sukritinorjuna |
aarto jignyaasurartharthee jnyaanee cha bharatarshabha || 16 ||*

Four types of people who perform good actions worship me, O Arjuna - the distressed, the inquisitive, the profit-minded and the wise, O scion of the Bharataas.

chaturvidhaaha : four types
bhajante : worship
maam : me
janaaha : people
sukritinaha : who perform good actions
arjuna : O Arjuna
aartaha : those who are in distress
jignyaasuhi : the inquisitive
artharthee : profit-minded
jnyaanee : wise
cha : and
bharatarshabha : O scion of the Bharataas

Shri Krishna is a methodical teacher. He loves to categorize and classify knowledge. In the previous shloka, he defined people who are blinded by maaya as "dushkritinaha" - those who commit wrong or evil actions. Such people cannot contact Ishvara. In this shloka, he adds the second category of people - those who perform good actions, "sukritinaha". He then further classifies these devotees of Ishvara into four types.

The first type of devotee is the "aarta" or the distressed. When such devotees are in trouble, when they have a health condition, when they have a monetary problem, when they are anxious about the result of the final exam, when there is nowhere else to go, they approach Ishvara for help. Usually, such devotees would not have remembered Ishvara if they were well off, if they had no source of affliction. Regardless, Ishvara accepts them as his devotees.

The second type of devotee is the "jignyaasu" or the inquisitive. Such people are seeking knowledge in all of its various aspects: economic knowledge, scientific knowledge, artistic knowledge and even spiritual knowledge. They worship Saraswati as the goddess of knowledge.

The third type of devotee is the "artharthee". Many commentators interpret this word as one who is desirous of "artha", which is profit or material gains. However, if we assume that the four types of devotees are arranged in order of importance, then "artha" could mean "purushaartha" which comprises dharma, artha, kaama (desire) and moksha (liberation). In other words, such a devotee has realized that he needs to use all his time and resources on this world to attain liberation.

Finally, the fourth type of devotee is the "jnyaani" or the wise one. He is the one who realized that there is nothing other than god. He sees god in everything. Therefore, he does not want god for some

other purpose. He wants god and nothing else. There are no other desires or ulterior motives in such a devotee.

Are all four devotees alike? Or is there one in particular that Shri Krishna prefers?

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 7

*teshaam jnyaanee nityayukta ekabhaktirvishishyate |
priyo hi jnyaaninotyarthamaham sa cha mama priyaha || 17 ||*

Among those, the wise one who is constantly connected with single-pointed devotion is special, for I am dear to him, and he is dear to me.

Previously, Shri Krishna enumerated the four types of devotees that seek Ishvara's refuge. Now, Shri Krishna says that the wise devotee is special among the four types of devotees. The wise devotee is always striving to be connected with him. Shri Krishna gives the reason for the special nature of this devotee in this and the next shloka.

A wise devotee has gone through a lot of ups and downs in life like anyone else. But he has taken the time to accurately analyze his situation. He has come to the conclusion that no matter what he gains - a new job, new house, investments and so on - he is still left with a sense of incompleteness. Unlike the other three types of devotees that seek something finite, he wants to go beyond finite things. In other words, he is seeking infinitude.

Having come to this conclusion, his search for infinitude has culminated in Ishvara. He intuitively knows that it is Ishvara that is going to give him infinitude. He then takes to the path of spirituality from the very early stages: karmayoga for purification of the mind, followed by meditation for single-pointedness of mind, hoping eventually to culminate in attainment of the infinite Ishvara.

There is another reason for the special nature of the wise devotee, which we shall see next.

teshaam : among those
jnyaanee : the wise one
nityayuktaha : constantly connected
ekabhaktihi : single-pointed devotion
vishishyate : is special
priyaha : dear
hi : for
jnyaaninaha : wise
atyartham : extremely
aham : I am
saha : he
cha : and
mama : me
priyaha : dear

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 7

*udaaraaha sarva evaite jnyaanee tvaatmaiva me matam |
aasthitaha sa hi yuktaatmaa maamevaanuttamaam gatim || 18 ||*

All those are certainly sincere, but only the wise one is my own self, in my opinion. For, he engages to become established in me only as the ultimate goal.

So far, Shri Krishna enumerated four types of devotees and singled out one of them, the wise one, as the most special type of devotee. This is because the wise devotee does not approach Ishvara for something else. He approaches Ishvara to gain only Ishvara and nothing else. Here, Shri Krishna adds another reason for singling out the wise devotee as special. The wise devotee considers Ishvara as his own self and not as another object.

First, let us look at the sense of oneness aspect. What is different between a good friend and an acquaintance? There is always a sense of "otherness" between ourselves and the acquaintance, but there is a sense of oneness with the good friend. We see this in a lot of proverbs: "a friend in need is a friend indeed", "my house is your house" on so on. The ultimate closeness with a friend is when we do not see any difference between doing something for ourselves, and doing something for our friend. In other words, we see our friend as our own self.

Similarly, whenever we expect something from God, we are by definition treating him as someone different from our own self. Shri Krishna says that he prefers if we treat him as our own self. Such kind of devotion, where the seeker plants himself in Ishvara day in and day out, and melts his existence into Ishvara's cosmic existence, is the greatest kind of devotion. This is also known as ekabhakti or advaita, where there is no duality between devotee and Ishvara.

However, the reality is different. Most of us consider Ishvara as different than ourselves. One colourful illustration of this is found in the Hindi phrase "bhee aur hee siddhanta" which means "also philosophy" vs "only philosophy". In other words, we love material objects and Ishvara "also". Shri Krishna says that we should love Ishvara "only" and not "also".

Now, this does not mean that Ishvara gives second class treatment

udaaraaha : sincere
sarva : all
eva : certainly
ite : those
jnyaanee : the wise one
tu : but
aatmaa : self
eva : only
me : my
matam : opinion
aasthitaha : established
saha : he
hi : for
yuktaatmaa : he engages
maam : me
eva : only
anuttamaam : ultimate
gatim : goal

to the other three types of devotees. Shri Krishna says that those other devotees are "udaaraha" or sincere. Ishvara is affectionate towards all of them.

Having pointed out the unique aspects of the wise devotee, Shri Krishna highlights the scarcity of wise devotees in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 7

*bahoonaam janmanaamante jnyaanavaanmaam prapadyate |
vaasudevaha sarvamiti sa mahaatmaa sudurlabhaha || 19 ||*

At the end of several births, the wise one seeks my refuge knowing that Vaasudev is everything. Such an individual is supreme and extremely rare.

bahoonaam : several
janmanaam : births
ante : end of
jnyaanavaan : the wise one
maam : my
prapadyate : seeks refuge
vaasudevaha : Vaasudev
sarvam : everything is
iti : in this manner
saha : he
mahaatmaa : supreme individual
sudurlabhaha : extremely rare

Shri Krishna previously pointed out that the wise devotee is special because he does not use Ishvara to gain anything else but Ishvara. He treats Ishvara no different than his own self. Here, Shri Krishna emphasizes the fact that such people, who know that the ultimate cause of everything is Ishvara, are extremely rare and exalted. In fact, it has taken them several lives worth of effort to get to this stage.

Let us examine the nature of this effort that has led to this vision of the wise devotee. This effort is of two types - the dawning of knowledge that there is a single cause behind everything, and the surrender of one's ego to that single cause or Ishvara. There is no specific order in which these can happen first, but both are necessary. The individual who has gone through so much effort to get to this stage is most certainly rare and privileged.

Now, we need to be careful in how we interpret the second half of this shloka. "Vaasudev" means one who resides in all, as well as one in whom everything and everyone resides. In other words, the phrase "Vaasudev is everything" denotes "Ishvara is everything". If we get stuck with the image of "Vaasudev", if we forget that Vaasudev is an indicator for the one Ishvara, we will begin to develop a fanatic attitude towards people who worship other deities.

Next, Shri Krishna elaborates on the topic of worship for finite gain.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 7

*kamaistaistairhritajnyaanaahaa prapadyantenyadevataahaa |
tam tam niyamamaasthaaya prakrityaa niyataahaa svayaa || 20 ||*

They, whose knowledge has been usurped by desires, seek refuge of other deities. They resort to rites, compelled by their own nature.

kamaihi : desires
taihi : those
hritajnyaanaahaa : they whose knowl-
edge has been usurped
prapadyante : seek refuge
anya : other
devataahaa : deities
tam : those
niyamam : rites
aasthaaya : resort
prakrityaa : nature
niyataahaa : compelled
svayaa : their own

Shri Krishna praised the wise devotee's quest for the infinite Ishvara in the previous shlokas. He now proceeds to describe the other category of devotees. These devotees feel a sense of incompleteness. They keep looking for finite things such as people, objects and situations to make themselves feel complete. Shri Krishna says that such devotees, compelled by their nature, seek the refuge of finite deities. They do so because their discrimination is usurped by the force of their desires.

First, let us look at what is meant by usurping of knowledge by desires. We have seen the example earlier of a family walking through a shopping mall. The husband and the wife see the exact same shops. Both their intellects give them the same knowledge of objects. In other words, both of them recognize that "this is a nice outfit" and "this is an Ipod". But their behaviour towards these objects will be different due to the difference in their respective desires. The husband will think "I want that Ipod" whereas the wife will think "I want that outfit".

Now, unlike the wise devotees, such devotees still have not shifted their focus towards the ultimate goal that will give them infinitude - Ishvara. They still harbour desires for material objects, people and situations that prevents them from contacting the infinite. So then, due to the force of their desires, they look for something finite to give them happiness. To that end, they propitiate deities that will give them their finite objects of desire. They approach Lord Ganesha to remove obstacles in their line of work, for example.

Their situation is no different than a businessman who wants to build a factory. He will have to appease the local minister to get land clearances. He will have to appease the local union leader to ensure the smooth running of his factory. He will have to appease his customers so that they will keep placing orders for his goods. But in doing so, he will have to dance to their tune. He may have to give someone's son-in-law a job in his factory, and so on and so forth. Similarly, in order to propitiate these deities, we may also have to follow prescribed rites

and rituals that are specific to each deity.

Shri Krishna says that even if pursuing limited or finite goals is not the way to go, Ishvara will still demonstrate compassion towards such devotees, indicated by the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 21, Chapter 7

yo yo yaam yaam tanum bhaktaha shraddhayaarchitumicchati |
tasya tasyaachalaam shraddhaam taameva vidadhaamyaham || 21 ||

**Whichever devotee desires to faithfully worship a particular form,
 I fortify his faith in exactly that (form).**

yaha : whosoever
 yaam : whichever
 tanum : form
 bhaktaha : devotee
 shraddhaya : faithfully
 architum : worship
 icchati : desires
 tasya : that
 achalaam : firm
 shraddhaam : faith
 taam : in that
 eva : exactly
 vidadhaami : make
 aham : I

The chapter so far dealt with the notion of the infinite Ishvara's ability to bless us with infinitude. But Shri Krishna recognized that not all devotees have the vision of pursuing that infinite Ishvara. That is why they worship finite, localized forms of Ishvara in the form of deities such as Ganesha, Saraswati and so on.

So in this shloka, Shri Krishna offers a ray of hope for such devotees. Even if we worship a finite deity with a finite goal, Ishvara will ensure that our finite goals are awarded to us. In doing so, Ishvara will strengthen our faith in that deity.

There is nothing wrong in asking for something finite. All notions of spirituality, no matter how finite the goal, are equally valid. They have the power to lift us from our egoic centre towards the universal.

For example, if we ask Saraswati for success in our exams, it is Ishvara who delivers that success through Saraswati. Saraswati becomes the channel through which Ishvara works. He is the running the whole show, as it were. But more important than the delivery of our desire is faith. Ishvara ensures that our faith in Saraswati is strengthened. It is because there will come a when that faith will be eventually turned towards Ishvara. More about this faith is mentioned next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 22, Chapter 7

*sa tayaa shraddhayaa yuktastasyaaraadhanameehate |
labhate cha tataha kaamaanmayaiiva vihitaanhi taan || 22 ||*

Engaged with faith, that person worships that (deity) and his desire is fulfilled, but that (desire fulfillment) is delivered only through me.

taan : that (desire fulfillment)

saha : that person
tayaa : that
shraddhayaa : with faith
yuktaha : engaged
araadhanam : worship
eehate : performs
labhate : fulfilled
cha : and
tataha : his
kaamaan : desire
mayaa : through me
eva : only
vihitaan : delivered
hi : but

When someone chooses to pursue a finite or a worldly goal, they run towards a finite deity instead of going towards Ishvara. We saw this in the previous shlokas. Shri Krishna continues that point here by saying that Ishvara does not object when devotee seeks a finite goal from a finite deity. In fact, he strengthens that devotee's faith by delivering what the devotee asks of the deity.

Faith is a process that most of us do not fully comprehend. But it is a reality. Even in the medical profession, placebos or pills made of inactive ingredients such as sugar are known to cure patients by sheer power of faith.

So Shri Krishna says that even if a devotee approaches a deity with a finite goal, Ishvara is ready to deliver that goal as long as the devotee's faith in the deity is strong. By fulfilling finite desires through the lower deities, Ishvara hopes that the devotee will learn to further subdue his ego. One cannot have an increase in faith without a decrease in ego.

As desires are sought with greater and greater faith, and the corresponding desires are fulfilled, the devotee's faith increases. This process has the potential to result in the spiritual evolution of that devotee. He will evolve from seeking finite goals to seeking the infinite - Ishvara himself.

This is the ideal state, but it is totally up to the devotee to make that transition. Unfortunately, most devotees get stuck in the pursuit of finite goals, as we shall see in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 23, Chapter 7

*antavattu phalam teshaam tadbhavatyalpamedhasaam |
devaandeveyajo yaanti madbhaktaa yaanti maamapi || 23 ||*

But, those with finite intellect obtain a perishable result. Worshipers of deities obtain those deities, (and) my devotees obtain me alone.

We saw that there were two kinds of devotees - those who pursue finite goals and those who pursue the infinite. Earlier, Shri Krishna said that there was nothing wrong with pursuing finite goals as long as such devotees eventually involve towards pursuing the infinite.

Why do most devotees contact a deity, someone or something that is higher than them? It is to acquire or obtain a goal that will relieve them of their finitude. Let's say they worship a deity and manage to obtain the object that they desire. Shri Krishna says that no matter what object is acquired, it will perish at some point. In other words, that object will be time-bound or space-bound. It will make the person happy for a short amount of time, after which he will begin to feel finite and consequently unhappy. The cycle of seeking another finite goal will start all over again.

Devotees who do not see the folly of repeatedly acquiring finite things are termed "alpa-medhasaa" or finite-minded by Shri Krishna. They will never be free of sorrow but will manage to suppress it temporarily. They are deprived of the knowledge which indicates the true nature of Ishvara. That is why we should never stop enquiring into the reality of things, and try to look beyond the material world for the real answers to our problems.

Shri Krishna goes on to say that those who worship deities may eventually obtain the favour of the deity, who will shower them with his grace. Though commendable, this outcome will still be futile, because the deity is still a finite entity. Only those who seek the infinite Ishvara will gain infinitude by which their sense of finitude or incompleteness will be taken care of once and for all.

So then, there has to be reason why most people do not seek infinitude. This is taken up next.

antavat : perishable
tu : but
phalam : result
teshaam : of those
tat : that
bhavati : obtain
alpamedhasaam : people of finite intellect
devaan : deities
devayajaha : those who worship
yaanti : obtain
madbhaktaaha : my devotee
yaanti : obtain
maam : me
api : alone

Bhagavad Gita Verse 24, Chapter 7

*avyaktam vyaktimaapannam manyante maamabuddhayaha |
param bhaavamajaananto mamaavyayamanuttamam || 24 ||*

avyaktam : unmanifest
vyaktim : human form
aapannam : assume
manyante : believe
maama : me
abuddhayaha : unintelligent
param : supreme
bhaavam : nature
ajaanantaha : not knowing
mama : my
avyayam : imperishable
anuttamam : incomparable

The unintelligent, not knowing my unmanifest, supreme, incomparable and imperishable nature, believe that I assume a human form.

"To one that holds a hammer, everything looks like a nail". When we get used to a certain mode of thinking or behaving, it becomes a disadvantage because that mode of thinking begins to limit our perspective. We spend all of our waking life taking in information from the sense organs - the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin. Due to this constant exposure, we tend to perceive everything in terms of these 5 senses. Ultimately, these senses limit what we can perceive.

Shri Krishna, having described the finite goal-seeking mindset of most people, now clearly articulates the problem that they face. Limited by their finite intellect, limited by the prison of the 5 senses, people tend to view Ishvara as a finite entity. As if this is not unfortunate enough, they get so attached to their favourite deity that they sometimes begin to develop a fanatic attitude - "my god is better than your god" and so on. The true Ishvara is beyond all senses. Neither the mind nor our speech can reach it. Ishvara is beyond all names and forms.

But, many of us go to temples to worship deities. Even spiritual masters worship deities. How should we understand this? It is because deities in a temple are indicators or pointers to the infinite. An idol in the shape of a deity helps us focus our attention on the form of the deity. But this focusing of attention on the finite deity is a stepping stone to contemplating the true nature of Ishvara which is infinite, imperishable and supreme.

What is the real reason for the problem pointed out here? Why do most people think of Ishvara in finite terms? This is examined next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 25, Chapter 7

*naaham prakaashaha sarvasya yogamaayaasamaavritaha |
moodhoyam naabhijaanaati loko maamajamavyayam || 25 ||*

Concealed by yoga maaya, I am not visible to everyone. Foolish people do not recognize me as unborn and unchanging.

na : not
aham : me
prakaashaha : visible
sarvasya : everyone
yogamaayaa : yoga maayaa
samaavritaha : concealed
moodhaha : foolish
ayam : this
na : do not
abhijaanaati : recognize
lokaha : people
maam : me
ajam : unborn
avyayam : unchanging

Earlier, Shri Krishna stated the fundamental problem that most people have with regards to understanding the nature of Ishvara. A mental limitation forces people to think of Ishvara as a visible, finite entity. Here, Shri Krishna provides the reason for this mental limitation. He says that Ishvara is hidden from us due to the power of maaya.

Our mind is trained to recognize two things: space and time. We can only see, hear, touch, smell and taste objects in space. We can also perceive changes in those objects, which is nothing but the time aspect. So, we are unable to perceive anything that is beyond space and time. We can say that space and time is maaya, or the three gunaas of prakriti known as sattva, rajas and tamas are maaya.

Shri Krishna says that Ishvara has disguised himself in a dress, as it were, made of maaya. Our senses can perceive only maaya. Therefore, we fail to comprehend Ishvara, who is beyond maaya, just like the light of the sun blinds us from seeing the sun itself. Those who think that only the visible is real and the invisible is unreal are called moodha or foolish. They fail to see the real nature of Ishvara which is beyond birth and death.

But if we cannot pierce through maaya, can Ishvara do so? We shall see next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 26, Chapter 7

*vedaaham samateetaani vartamaanaani chaarjuna |
bhavishyaani cha bhootaani maam tu veda na kashchana || 26 ||*

I know those beings who used to exist, who exist now, and who will exist in the future, O Arjuna, but no one knows me.

veda : know
aham : I
samateetaani : those who have existed
vartamaanaani : those that exist
cha : and
arjuna : O Arjuna
bhavishyaani : those who will exist
cha : and
bhootaani : beings
maam : I
tu : but
veda : know
na : not
kashchana : anyone

In continuing the topic of maaya, Shri Krishna makes it very clear that maaya or the limitations of space and time do not have any impact on Ishvara. He says that Ishvara does not identify with any one form, therefore he has knowledge of all forms in the past, present or future. In other words, Ishvara transcends time.

Earlier, Shri Krishna had said that Ishvara is like a string that goes through all the beads in a necklace, which is a poetic way of saying that Ishvara is beyond space. So therefore, we can conclude that Ishvara is beyond space and time.

Looking at it differently, we who inhabit the world of three dimensions cannot understand the dimensionless Ishvara. When viewing a live broadcast, we are conscious of the time aspect because we cannot know how the broadcast will end. But if we are viewing a recorded program, we have the ability to go backwards and forwards in time and see all the events regardless of when they took place. Time as a concept ceases to exist if we have that ability.

Similarly, from Ishvara's standpoint, there is no such thing as the past, present or future, because the concept of time does not exist for him. That is how he can have knowledge of everyone that was alive, is alive and will be alive.

What is the implication for us? The only way to know Ishvara completely is to surrender to him and take refuge in him. This means knowing that we do not have an independent existence or power apart from Ishvara. We need to lose our identity in Ishvara, become one with Ishvara.

Now, if we know that Ishvara alone is the truth, that alone is going to give infinite happiness, why don't we really strive to know that Ishvara? Why is it that we get stuck here and there? This is answered in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 27, Chapter 7

*ichchaadveshasamutthena dvandvamohena bhaarata |
sarvabhootani sammoham sarge yaanti parantapa || 27 ||*

O Bhaarata, ever since the creation (of this world), all beings attain ignorance by the delusion born of duality, O Arjuna.

ichchaa : desire
dvesha : hatred
samutthena : born of
dvandva : duality
mohena : delusion
bhaarata : O Bhaarata
sarvabhootani : all beings
sammoham : deluded
sarge : creation
yaanti : attain
parantapa : O Parantapa

If someone says "I love my job" or "I love to go to this city" we have no doubt in understanding that there is satisfaction in that emotion of loving something. But if someone says "I hate my boss", we may not admit it but there is satisfaction in expressing hatred as well. It is next to impossible for our mind to think of anything without a tinge of love or hate.

Shri Krishna says that the moment we are born, we are cast into this double or dualistic thinking. We can never think an integrated, holistic thought because we are forced to think in terms of likes and dislikes. We run after a certain object because we like it so much and cannot live without it. We finally acquire it. But once that happens, that we begin to dislike that very object that we could not live without. Ultimately every such pursuit results in sorrow.

So therefore, how do we get rid of our likes and dislikes, and begin to think holistically? Karma yoga is the answer. By relentlessly performing actions for the service of a higher ideal, we eliminate likes and dislikes to a great extent. Every sense organ has a like and dislike for its respective objects. That is an undeniable truth. But whether or not we fuel these likes and dislikes is up to us. Breaking away from the clutches of the sense organs prepares us for piercing the screen of maaya.

Now, if we summarize the shlokas so far, we have the entire problem laid in front of us. Maaya caused by our dualistic disposition blocks us, prevents us from accessing the true nature of Ishvara. Unless we gain this access, we are trapped in samsara or earthly existence. What should we now do?

Bhagavad Gita Verse 28, Chapter 7

yesham tvantagatam paapam janaanaam punyakarmanaam |
te dvandvamohanirmuktaa bhajante maam dridhavrataahaa || 28 ||

But, those people of meritorious actions whose sins have been exhausted, they, freed from the delusion of duality, worship me with firm determination.

yesham : those who
 tu : but
 antagatam : exhausted
 paapam : sin
 janaanaam : people
 punyakarmanaam : meritorious actions
 te : they
 dvandvamoha : delusion of duality
 nirmuktaa : freed
 bhajante : worship
 maam : me
 dridhavrataahaa : firm determination

The delusion of duality, as we saw earlier, is a condition that we are cast into right from birth. This delusion further strengthens maaya that prevents us from accessing Ishvara. Having explained the condition of most people who are trapped in this situation, Shri Krishna now describes the people who have come out of maaya. He says that only those who have conducted enough meritorious acts and wiped out their sins acquire the firm resolution to directly access Ishvara.

Let us revisit what exactly is meant here by merits and sins. What is a sin? Any time that our mind and senses drag us into the world, and force us to conduct actions born out of selfish desire, we commit a sin. When this happens again and again, it adds to the moha or delusion that blocks our discrimination or viveka.

Conversely, whenever we perform an unselfish action that is in line with our svadharma or duty, we commit a merit. In doing so, we do not add to the stock of delusion, but in fact purify our mind.

Therefore, Shri Krishna says that only those who perform unselfish actions are fit to approach Ishvara. The message is clear: do your duty because it is the only way to contact Ishvara. Karma yoga, seen from this vantage point, reasserts its importance.

Next, Shri Krishna begins to conclude this chapter by planting the seed of the next chapter in two shlokas. They deal with the fundamental question of our ultimate liberation.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 29, Chapter 7

*jaraamaranamokshaaya maamashritya yatanti ye |
te brahma tadviduhu kritsnamadhyaatmam karma chaakhilam || 29 ||*

Those who strive for liberation from old age and death seeking my refuge, they know "brahman" as well as "adhyaatma" and "karma" completely.

As a prelude to the eighth chapter, Shri Krishna introduces a series of technical terms that a devotee needs to know the meaning of in order to gain access to Ishvara. The terms are listed in this shloka and the next shloka, whereas the meaning of the terms is explained in the beginning of the eighth chapter.

Who exactly is this devotee? Shri Krishna says that it is that devotee who is striving. In other words, he is performing karma yoga for purification of his mind and intellect, and has become ready for meditation. But this devotee is not driven by blind faith. He is a jnyaani or wise devotee.

So now, what should the wise devotee have knowledge of? Three technical terms are mentioned in this shloka : brahman, adhyaatma and karma. Some more terms will be added in the next and last shloka of the seventh chapter.

jaraa : old age
marana : death
mokshaaya : for liberation from
maam : my
ashritya : taken refuge
yatanti : strive
ye : those who
te : they
brahma : brahman
tat : that
viduhu : know
kritsnam : completely
adhyaatmam : adhyaatma
karma : karma
cha : and
akhilam : entire

Bhagavad Gita Verse 30 Chapter 7

*saadhibhootaadhidaivam maam saadhiyagnyam cha ye viduhu |
prayanaakaalepi cha maam te viduryuktachetasaha || 30 ||*

Those who know me with "adhibhoota", "adhidaiva" and "adhiyagnya" with a focused mind during the time of departure, they realize only me.

sa : with
maam : me
sa : with
cha : and
ye : those who
viduhu : know
prayanaakaale : during the time of
departure
api : also
cha : and
maam : me
te : they
viduhu : realize
yuktachetasaha : focused mind

Studying the Gita is akin to taking off in an airplane. Each chapter takes us to a higher and higher level of understanding. In this, the final shloka of the seventh chapter, we are taken from the level of the individual to the level of the cosmic. Shri Krishna introduces a topic that all of us have to confront: how should we prepare ourselves for death ?

We cannot begin to answer this question unless we gain an understanding of the cosmos, where did it come from, how is it sustained, where is it going and so on. Therefore, Shri Krishna in the eighth chapter shifts gears to address these questions.

Here, he introduces three additional terms: "adhibhoota", "adhidaiva" and "adhiyagnya". These terms along with the 3 terms from the previous shloka will be explained in the beginning of the next chapter. He also says that the wise devotee who has his mind focused on Ishvara realizes or attains Ishvara.

Let's say we only think of chocolate ice cream for an entire day, non-stop. We do not let any other thought come into our mind. When we wake up the next day, what would be our first thought? Chocolate ice cream, of course. Similarly, Shri Krishna says that whatever we think just before we die shapes our destiny after we die. If we think of something worldly during the time of death, our destiny will be worldly. But if we think of Ishvara during our time of dying, we will attain Ishvara.

Now, although we like to plan our lives to the nth degree, none of us knows when we will die. If that is the case, the thought that is top priority in our minds will become our final thought. If we are worried about our job all the time, that will be our last thought. If we are worried about our family all the time, that will be our last thought. If we are worried about our the state of the world all the time, that will be

our last thought.

Therefore, the practical lesson here is that we should learn to direct our attention towards Ishvara while we are performing our duties on this world. How exactly we should do this, as well as how the cosmos came into existence, is the topic of the eighth chapter.

*om tatsatiti shrimadbhagavadgitasu upanishadsu brahmavidyayaam
yogashastre shrikrishnaarjunasamvade jnyaanavignyaanayogonaamo sapta-
modhyaahaha || 7 ||*

Summary Of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 7

In the sixth chapter, Shri Krishna elaborated upon the technique of meditation. But one question was left unanswered. What or whom do we meditate upon? Shri Krishna answers that question in this chapter. He urges us to meditate upon him and begins speaking to us as Ishvara.

Before he describes what Ishvara really is, he assures us that we shall know him completely through knowledge combined with wisdom. Just academic knowledge about Ishvara is not sufficient. He adds that those who seek wisdom, which is the vision of Ishvara in his essence, are rare.

Shri Krishna says that there are 2 aspects of Ishvara, the lower and the higher. The lower nature comprises the five elements plus the mind, ego and intellect. The higher nature comprises the life-giving force which is also the experienter, the subject. Ishvara is the ultimate cause of the universe. As the origin and cause of the universe he pervades all things like a string pervades beads in a necklace. To illustrate, he gives examples of his manifestations or vibhootis - he is the fragrance in earth and brightness in fire and so on.

So then, what is it that veils Ishvara from us, prevents us from accessing Ishvara? It is his maaya, which is nothing but the three gunaas - sattva, rajas and tamas. Sattva represents harmony, rajas represents action and tamas represents inertia. These three forces or energies create the entire universe. Only by surrendering to Ishvara can we cross over this maaya, and only a certain kind of person is fit to do so.

According to Shri Krishna, there are two categories of people - those who perform evil actions and those who perform good actions. The performers of good actions who turn to something that is higher than them are called devotees. Those devotees are further divided into 4 types : the distressed, the inquisitive, the seeker of liberation and the wise. The wise devotee is the dearest to Ishvara because he seeks Ishvara as his own self, seeking nothing else.

But unlike the wise devotee, the other three types of devotees seek Ishvara for something finite. Ishvara is not against this because at the very least it strengthens their faith and weakens their ego, so that one day they can aim for the real deal - realization of the infinite Ishvara, not a deity that can only provide finite ends. Till that happens, Ishvara delivers the results through those finite deities.

Ishvara's true nature is beyond maaya, which means he is beyond the three gunaas, beyond our mind and senses, unborn and unchanging. He is beyond space and time. But ever since the beginning of creation, most of us bound by maaya are under the sway of space, time and the three gunaas.

The conclusion is clear. Only those who aspire to realize Ishvara in his true infinite nature, and are ready to do so every moment of their life, will attain Ishvara. Karma yoga purifies our mind to prepare us for this task. But we need to learn the means by which we can gradually train ourselves to go beyond the finite notion of Ishvara. That is the topic of the eighth chapter, which first elaborates upon the technical terms introduced at the end of this chapter.



Akshara Brahma Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 8**Arjuna uvaacha:**kim tadbrahma kimadhyaatmam kim karma purushottama |
adhibhootam cha kim proktamadhidaivam kimuchyate || 1 ||*

kim : what is
 tat : that
 brahma : brahman
 adhyaatma : adhyaatma
 karma : karma
 purushottama : O supreme person
 adhibhootam : adhibhoota
 cha : and
 proktam : what is termed as
 adhidaivam : adhidaivam
 uchyate : what is termed as

Arjuna said:What is that brahman? What is adhyaatma? What is karma? O supreme person. What is termed as adhibhoota and adhidaiva?

Shri Krishna ended the previous chapter by referencing some technical terms, and stressed the need for Arjuna to understand these terms completely so that he could realize Ishvara. Here, Arjuna does a favour to all future students of the Gita by asking Shri Krishna to clearly define these terms. In that regard, Arjuna asks the definition of four terms in this shloka: adhyaatma, karma, adhibhoota and adhidaiva.

This chapter is perhaps one of the more philosophical and esoteric chapters of the Gita. It deals with the theme of life after death, something that has not been addressed so far in the Gita. Furthermore, The definition of the aforementioned technical terms is provided, but has been interpreted differently by various commentators, so we need to chose the most clear and straightforward explanation. We will also get a sweeping glimpse of the Gita's view on the origin of the cosmos.

To better understand these technical terms, let us set up an illustration. First, let us quickly look at how a movie projector works. A projector consists of a bright light that shines onto a strip of film. This film strip contains a series of images that are shot by a movie camera, or drawn by an animator in case of an animated movie. When the film strip is run through the projector, the images are projected onto the movie screen. The fast speed of the moving images creates the illusion of movement on the screen.

Let us further say that there is an animated movie called "Tom" that shows a day in the life of Tom who is a teenager. Tom wakes up, eats breakfast, goes to school, comes back home, plays with his friends and goes to sleep. It is a very simple movie. Like any other animated movie it follows a script written by a scriptwriter, and is in fact a sequence of images drawn by an animator.

Now, here's where we have to stretch our thinking. Imagine that by

some inexplicable magic, the light that shines on Tom on the film strip begins to think that it is different than the light that shines on the other part of the film strip. It develops an identity of its own. It even begins to think that it is actually waking up, going to school and so on.

The light of the projector has identified itself with Tom. What happens next? We will continue to develop this illustration further in the explanation of the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 8

*adhiyagnaha katham kotra dehesminmadhusoodana |
prayaanakaale cha katham jneyosi niyataatmabhihi || 2 ||*

Who is adhiyagna and how is he (established) in this body, O Madhusoodana? How are (you) known by a self-controlled person, at the time of departure?

adhiyagnaha : adhiyagna
katham : how
kaha : who
atra : here
dehe : in a body
asmin : this
madhusoodana : O Madhusoodana
prayaanakaale : at the time of departure
cha : and
katham : how
jneyaha asi : is known
niyataatmabhihi : by a self-controlled person

Arjuna concludes his round of questions to Shri Krishna in this shloka. His two questions are as follows. First, he wants to know what is "adhiyagna" and where can it be found. Second, he wants to know how can a yogi or a self-controlled person remember Ishvara at the time of departure. Shri Krishna treats the second question as the most important question. After answering the first six questions in the next two shlokas, Shri Krishna devotes the remainder of the chapter to answering this question only.

Let us continue to develop the illustration of the animated movie so that we can use it in the next shloka when Shri Krishna starts answering Arjuna's questions. We learned about the animated character "Tom", which is just a series of images on film. The light that illuminated Tom began to think that it has an identity that is different than the rest of the film strip.

As a consequence, the light creates an identity for itself. That light becomes Tom. "He" is bound by his "body", which is nothing but an outline on the strip of film. He also begins to think that he is the "doer" of an action, and is the "enjoyer" of the result of an action. He thinks that he is walking, talking, interacting with people. He also gets happy or upset over the result of his actions.

So in summary, we have a strip of film that contains a series of images. Each image contains several lines that make up the character Tom that has suddenly begun to think that he is alive. Let us keep this in mind as we begin to hear Shri Krishna's answers.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 8**Shree Bhagavan uvaacha:**aksharam brahma paramam svabhaavodhyaatmamuchyate |
bhootabhaavodbhavakaro visargaha karmasamjnyitam || 3 ||*

aksharam : imperishable
 brahma : brahman
 paramam : supreme
 svabhaavaha : individual nature
 adhyaatmam : adhyaatma
 uchyaate : is called
 bhoota : beings
 bhaavaha : existence
 bhavakaraha : produce
 visargaha : force
 karma : karma
 samjnyitam : defined

Shree Bhagavan said: Brahman is the imperishable supreme. Adhyaatma is individual nature. Karma is defined as the force that produces the existence of beings.

As we saw earlier, Arjuna asked seven questions to Shri Krishna. In this shloka, three questions are answered. We shall use the illustration of the animated character Tom to get an additional perspective on the answers given by Shri Krishna.

First, Shri Krishna answers the question "What is that brahman". He says that brahman is the imperishable, supreme eternal essence that we encountered in the second chapter. In terms of our illustration, brahman is the light in the movie projector that illuminates the film strip. It has no specific shape, qualities or attributes. It is just light. It stands as a witness and is not affected by whatever is happening in the movie. It can exist without the movie, but the movie cannot exist without it.

"What is adhyaatma" is answered next. Shri Krishna says that it is svabhaava, or the set of qualities of an individual. Each person in this world has a unique combination of attributes, a unique permutation of sattva, rajas and tamas that is their own. When the universal eternal essence is conditioned or covered by an individual's attributes, it is known as adhyaatma or aatma.

In the example of the movie projector, karma refers to the portion of light that illuminates the character of Tom. Suppose Tom is wearing a blue outfit and is walking on a green lawn. A portion of the movie projector's light shines blue on the movie screen. The other portion shines blue. The portion of light that shines blue and thinks that it has its own identity - that is adhyaatma.

Lastly, Shri Krishna answers the question "What is karma". He says that it is the force that brings about the creation of every entity in this universe. At one level, it is the mechanism in the projector that brings to life the story that lies hidden in the film strip. At another level, it is

the animator's act of drawing the characters in the movie. Essentially, it is the force that converts an unmanifested object into a manifested object.

Similarly, we can say that Ishvara set into motion this entire universe with the one original action that has resulted into the millions and millions of actions that occur in the universe every second. It was the seed of all future actions in the universe. But our ego, our false sense of individuality, comes under the delusion that it is the doer of all actions. Each such individualistic action causes us to further identify with our body, and go further from liberation. Ultimately, like the movie that eventually ends in two hours, everything that is unmanifested will be manifested and will be dissolved, only to start all over again.

Shri Krishna continues with his explanations in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 8

*adhibhootam ksharo bhaavaha purushashchaadhidaivatam |
adhiyagnohamevaatra dehe dehabhritaam vara || 4 ||*

adhibhootam : adhibhootam
ksharo : perishable
bhaavaha : existence
purusha : the person
cha : and
adhidaivatam : adhidaiva
adhiyagna : adhiyagna
aham : I am
eva : only
atra : this
dehe : body
dehabhritaam : among the embodied
vara : eminent

Adhibhootam is perishable existence. Adhidaiva is the person. And, I only am adhiyagnya in this body, O eminent among the embodied.

Three out of Arjuna's seven questions were answered by Shri Krishna in the previous shloka. Here, three more questions are answered : what is adhibhootam, what is adhidaiva and what is adhiyagnya. Again, we shall use the running illustration of the projector and the animated movie to better understand the answers.

Let us start with the definition of adhibhootam, which the shloka terms as perishable existence. It refers to everything in the universe that is visible. With regards to our example, it refers to everything in the movie that is visible except Tom. So, for example, if a scene in the movie comprises Tom sitting in a classroom, then everything in the classroom is adhibhoota: his classmates, his teacher, the benches, the windows, the walls and so on.

The one common quality that they share is that they are perishable, they have a beginning and an end. When the movie starts, we come to know that the classroom exists. When the movie ends, the classroom is no more.

Next, let us look at the definition of adhidaiva. Literally, it is defined as "purusha" or person in the shloka. But what it really means is the creative or intelligent principle that resides within every living and non-living object in universe. It determines the fate of the universe and holds the universe together.

From the perspective of our example, adhidaiva is the movie script. The character Tom may not know why he gets into an accident, or wins an unexpected lottery, but the script knows exactly why it happens, and how it fits into the entire movie. The script determines the fate of the movie. It also ensures that what we see is harmonious and logical, not a random disjointed series of images.

Now, let's examine what is meant by adhiyagnya. So far we have defined the light that illuminates Tom (adhyaatma), the light that il-

luminates everything else (adhibhoota), the creative intelligence of the movie (adhidaiva), the mechanism of projection (karma), and the light itself (brahman). But there is one more aspect that is missing in this scheme.

From the minute Tom wakes up in the morning to when he goes to bed at night, he is not idle. He is active in this world. He transacts with his family, his friends, his teachers, even strangers. There is a give-and-take happening throughout the day that compels him to act. Shri Krishna says that this world of activity and relationships is termed as adhiyagnya.

Now we come to the key point. Addressing Arjuna fondly as "eminent among the embodied", Shri Krishna asserts that adhyaatma, adhidaiva, adhibhoota, karma and adhidaiva are nothing but Ishvara. Ishvara and brahman are the same, it is just that one is with form and one is formless. Similarly, everything that we see on the screen is nothing but a modification of the light of the projector. Whatever Tom does or experiences in the movie is just an illusion. When the film strip stops moving, we see the formless white light on the screen.

Next, Shri Krishna starts answering the seventh question, which makes up the bulk of this chapter.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 8

*antakaale cha maameva smaranmuktvaa kalevaram |
yaha prayaati sa madbhaavam yaati naastyatra samshayaha || 5 ||*

One who, even during the time of departure, abandons his body while remembering me, he achieves my true nature, in this matter there is no doubt.

The remainder of this chapter is the answer to the fundamental questions raised by Arjuna : "How does one attain Ishvara at the time of death?" Having addressed all the other questions, Shri Krishna begins to answer that most important question in this shloka. He says that only the one who remembers Ishvara at the time of death will attain Ishvara.

We now have a definite "action item" from Shri Krishna. He asserts that our final goal in life should be this: to remember Ishvara at the time of death. Shri Krishna assures it is so, because he says "in this matter there is no doubt". It is clearly spelled out for us.

At first glance, it may seem straightforward. All we have to do is to remember Ishvara at the time of death. But it is not so. In most cases, we may not know when we die. We could die in an accident. We could have lost our mental faculties. Our attachment towards our family will occupy our minds. There are so many factors that will prevent us from remembering Ishvara only at the time of death.

So then, how do we get around this problem? Shri Krishna addresses it shortly. First, he explains why our thought at the time of death is so important.

antakaale : during the time of departure
cha : and
maam : me
eva : even
smaran : remembering
muktvaa : abandons
kalevaram : body
yaha : one who
prayaati : goes
saha : he
madbhaavam : my nature
yaati : achieves
na : no
asti : is
atra : in this matter
samshayaha : doubt

Bhagavad Gita Verse 6, Chapter 8

yam yam vaapi smaranbhaavam tyajante kalevaram |
tam tamevaiti kaunteya sadaa tadbhaavabhaavitaha || 6 ||

When (one) thinks of whatever state, while leaving the body at the end, O Kaunteya, (one) always having been absorbed in that, attains only that.

yam : whichever
 vaa api : any
 smaran : thinking
 bhaavam : state
 tyajati : leave
 ante : at the end
 kalevaram : body
 tam : that
 eva : only
 iti : that
 kaunteya : O Kaunteya
 sadaa : always
 tadbhaava : having thought of it
 bhaavitaha : attains

The Srimad Bhagavatam contains the story of the great king Bharata. He was an accomplished king. He ran his kingdom well during his lifetime, and later retired into the forest to lead a life of austerity. But he developed a soft corner for a baby deer and became so attached to it that he would only think of the deer instead of focusing on his austerities. It is said that in his next life, he was born as a deer.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna asserts that whatever we think about at the time of death will determine our fate. But more importantly, he also states that the thought at the time of death is not really something that we can control. It is in fact, an outcome of our pattern of thinking throughout our lives.

If we examine our thoughts over the course of our day, we will notice a great variety of thinking. For most of us it will be a mix of mostly family-related and work-related thoughts, mixed with some thoughts about spirituality. But in the background, we will always have a thought that is going on all the time. It will come to the forefront when we are alone, or when we have opened our eyes after sleeping, but not fully woken up. For King Bharata, that persistent background thought was that of the deer.

So then, our deepest love, our deepest interest and our deepest longing will bear fruit in our next life. Having known this, what should we now do? This is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 8

*tasmaatsarveshu kaaleshu maamanusmara yudhya cha |
mayyarpitamanobuddhirmaamevaishyasyasamshayam || 7 ||*

Therefore, remember me at all times and fight. One who offers his mind and intellect to me attains me only, without a doubt.

Shri Krishna gives the ultimate teaching to all of mankind in this shloka. Since the thought at the time of death determines our fate after death, and the thought of death is an outcome of our lifelong thinking, Shri Krishna instructs us to remember Ishvara at all times and perform our duties.

Let us examine this instruction further. We are not asked to give up our duties, retire to a forest and constantly think of Ishvara there. Shri Krishna wants us to first remember Ishvara, and then perform duty consistent with our svadharma. The result of leading such a life is that we will attain Ishvara certainly. There is no doubt in this matter.

With this instruction, meditation takes on a whole new dimension. Typically, we confine meditation to something that we do for fifteen to thirty minutes, sitting in a solitary place as instructed in the sixth chapter. We now realize that those instructions were meant to prepare us for the kind of meditation that Shri Krishna wants us to pursue: 24/7 meditation of Ishvara.

How can this be possible? Our mind can only think of one thought at a time. So the way to meditate continuously is to somehow understand that everything we see, do and know is Ishvara.

Now we understand why Shri Krishna defined the terms brahma, karma, adhibhuta, adhideva, adhyaatma, adhiyagnya at the beginning of the chapter, because all those are nothing but Ishvara. If, while performing any action, we know that the actor, the action, the instrument, the process and the result - everything is Ishvara - we will never forget Ishvara.

Even if this kind of thinking is not possible for us in the beginning, we can emulate the mind of a mother who, regardless of what she is doing, always thinks about her child in the background. By practising meditation on our favourite deity we develop an attachment to it, so

tasmaat : therefore
sarveshu : all
kaaleshu : times
maam : me
anusmara : remember
yudhya : fight
cha : and
mayi : to me
arpita : offer
manaha : mind
buddhihi : intellect
maam : me
eva : only
eshyasi : attains
asamshayam : without a doubt

that we can recall it every time we feel distant from Ishvara.

So therefore, by practicing meditation constantly on Ishvara, we should strive to change our thinking such that our final thought will be nothing but Ishvara. This constant meditation upon Ishvara is called upaasanaa.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 8

*abhyaasayogayuktena chetasaa naanyagaaminaa |
paramam purusham divyam yaati paarthaanuchintayan || 8 ||*

With the mind engaged in constant practice of yoga, not diverting from it, contemplating the supreme divine person, (one) attains (him), O Paartha.

abhyaasa : constance practice
yoga : yoga
yuktena : engaged in
chetasaa : mind
na : not
anyagaaminaa : diverting from
paramam : supreme
purusham : person
divyam : divine
yaati : attains
paartha : O Paartha
anuchintayan : contemplating

Now that we know that the ultimate goal is upaasana, or constant meditation on Ishvara, how do we actually go about doing it? Shri Krishna described three kinds of meditation in the upcoming shlokas.

To perform upaasana, we need the support of either name or form, since it is extremely difficult to meditate upon something that is intangible. In the following three shlokas, Shri Krishna elaborates upon the technique of meditation on form. Here, he recalls the technique that was presented to us in the sixth chapter - abhyaasa yoga. In this technique, the mind is trained to focus exclusively on one thing. If it diverts to something else, then we bring it back to our object of meditation.

So then, what is the form that we meditate upon? We can meditate upon any form that we have a closeness to. It could be Lord Rama, Krishna, Hanuman or any deity. The deity should come to our mind effortlessly. There is no compulsion to chose one over the other. But as discussed earlier, we should be clear that the deity is an indicator or pointer to Ishvara, the supreme divine person being the words used in this shloka. We should not get stuck at the level of the deity we have chosen.

For those of us who are not so familiar with these deities, we can read scriptures like the Puraanaas that have wonderful stories describing the lives and exploits of these deities. Growing up in India, our generation was fortunate to read Amar Chitra Katha comics that presented these stories in a format that appealed to us as kids. They are available all over the world now.

As we increase our prowess in meditation, our notion of Ishvara also grows. To help us meditate upon Ishvara in all his grandeur, Shri Krishna gives us a pointer to this type of meditation in the next shloka that describes the form of the param purusha, the supreme being.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 9, Chapter 8

*kavim puraanamanushaasitaaramanoraneeyaamsamanusmaredyaha |
sarvasya dhaataaramachintyaroopamaadityavarnam tamasaha parastaat | | 9
| |*

He who is omniscient, timeless, the commander, subtler than the subtlest, protector of all, incomprehensible, brilliant like the sun, beyond darkness, (one) contemplates (him).

kavim : omniscient
puranaam : timeless
anushaasitaaram : commander
anoraaneeyaamsam : subtler than the subtlest
anusmaret : contemplate
yaha : he who
sarvasya : all
dhaataaram : protector
achintyaroopam : incomprehensible
aadityavarnam : brilliant as the sun
tamasaha : darkness
parastaat : beyond

As part of the series of shlokas that help us meditate on Ishvara's form, Shri Krishna here gives us a beautiful poetic shloka that describes Ishvara's grandeur. This is the description of the "parama purusha", the supreme divine person Ishvara that was referenced in the previous shloka. Note that this shloka has a different meter for added emphasis.

First, Ishvara is described as one who is beyond the notion of space and time. He is "kavi" which means omniscient or all knowing, which is different than the standard meaning of kavi which is poet. There is nothing we can hide from Ishvara because he knows all. He is also "puraanam" which means ancient and timeless. Kavi means he transcends space, puraanam means he transcends time.

Ishvara is described as "anushaasitaaram", which means one who controls everything, who has final authority over everything. He is also "sarvasya dhaataaram", one who maintains and ordains everything, one who distributes the result of everyone's actions. In other words, Ishvara comprises the set of laws that hold the entire universe together.

Shri Krishna also cautions us with regard to giving a lot of importance to the visual form of Ishvara. Ishvara is "anoraaneeyaamsam", smaller or subtler than the smallest particle we can comprehend. He is not visible to our senses or to the most powerful of microscopes. He is also "achintya roopam". His form is incomprehensible. He can never be made into an object, because he is our own self, the subject. By symbolically comparing Ishvara to the sun - "aaditya varnam" - Shri Krishna indicates that our senses cannot comprehend Ishvara's brilliance. It is the light that drives away darkness and ignorance - "tamasa parastah".

So therefore, we should try to contemplate on this form of Ishvara

throughout our lives, so that we can remember this picture during our final moments.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 8

*prayaanakaale manasaachalena bhaktyaa yukto yogabalena chaiva |
bhruvormadhye praanamaaveshya samyak sa tam param purushamupaiti di-
vyam || 10 ||*

At the time of departure, endowed with devotion, an unwavering mind, as well as the power of yoga, fully establishing the praanaas in the centre of the eyebrows, he attains that supreme divine person.

The puraanaas contain several stories describing how people endowed with yogic powers could control their life force or their praana and force it out of the body. At the end of the Mahabharata, many people including Yudhishtira and Draupadi left their bodies using yogic powers. If we interpret this shloka literally, it describes how one can remember Ishvara's form while voluntarily starting the process of departing the body.

We, of course, do not know anything about such techniques, nor do we wish to pursue it. So therefore, let us examine the symbolic meaning of this shloka. "Prayaana kale" literally means the time of departure or death. Symbolically, it signifies the death of the ego, or the end of our notion of finitude. Therefore, when we rid ourselves of selfish desires, likes and dislikes, and in doing so slay the ego, we automatically develop firm devotion or bhakti towards Ishvara.

As our devotion increases, our mind's tendency to jump from one thought to the other slows down, settling into the one thought of Ishvara. We can then meditate on the form of Ishvara as the supreme, divine person or parama purusha. All the energy that would normally have been wasted in selfish thinking and action is available to us now. We can channel this reservoir of energy towards meditation.

So therefore, if we use these instructions to develop the daily habit of meditating upon Ishvara, we will naturally and easily remember Ishvara when it is time for us to leave this world. The key thing, of course, is not to forcibly practice meditation, but to gradually ease into it as our level of devotion to Ishvara increases.

With this shloka, Shri Krishna concludes the topic of meditation on Ishvara's form. The topic of meditation on Ishvara's name is taken up next.

prayaanakaale : at the time of departure
manasa : with mind
achalena : unwavering
bhaktyaa : with devotion
yuktaha : endowed with
yogabalena : power of yoga
cha : and
iva : also
bhruvoho : eyebrows
madhye : centre
praanam : praanaas
aaveshya : establishing
samyak : fully
saha : he
tam : that
param : supreme
purusham : person
upaiti : attains
divyam : divine

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 8

yadaksharam vedavido vadanti vishanti yadyatayo veetaraagaahaa |
yadichchanto brahmacharyam charanti tatte padam sangrahaena pravakshye
 || 11 ||

That which is declared imperishable by the knowers of the Vedas, that which dispassionate sages enter, that whose desire leads them to engage in the study of brahman; for you, I shall speak of that goal, in summary.

Having spoken of the technique of meditating upon Ishvara's form, Shri Krishna now begins the topic of meditating upon Ishvara's name. This shloka is written in the style of the Upanishads, and just like the previous shloka, is in a different meter.

Before the actual technique of meditation is described, Shri Krishna highlights the qualifications of the seeker who is about to perform this meditation. He should be free of selfish desires, likes and dislikes, indicated by the word "veetaraagaahaa". We have already encountered this word under the topic of karma yoga. Strong passions or dislikes become obstacles in meditation as they push the mind to jump from one thought to the other. Only one who has managed to control the mind can perform such meditation.

The seeker should also possess a strong desire to inquire into the knowledge of the eternal essence, indicated by the word "brahmachari". The typical meaning of this word, celibacy, is not used here. It is used to indicate one who "moves around" or is preoccupied with the study of brahman or the eternal essence. Most of us, however, are preoccupied with actions. We are "karmacharis". Preoccupation with action will also become an obstacle in meditation, as we have already seen in the sixth chapter.

Endowed with these qualifications, the seeker is ready to meditate upon that which is considered as the ultimate goal: the imperishable Ishvara or "aksharam". What is the process by which one can perform this meditation? This is taken up in the next two shlokas.

yat : that which
 aksharam : imperishable
 vedavidaha : knowers of Vedas
 vadanti : declared
 vishanti : enter
 yat : that which
 yatayaha : sages
 veetaraagaahaa : dispassionate
 yat : that which
 ichchantaha : desiring
 brahmacharyam : study of brahman
 charanti : engage
 tat : that
 te : for you
 padam : goal
 sangrahaena : in summary
 pravakshye : I shall speak

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 8

*sarvadvaaraani saiyamya mano hridi nirudhya cha |
moordhanyaadhaayaatmanaha praanamaasthito yogadhaaranaam || 12 ||*

Controlling all the gates, confining the mind within the heart and establishing one's praanaas in the forehead, situated in yogic concentration.

sarvadvaaraani : all gates
saiyamya : controlling
manaha : mind
hridi : in the heart
nirudhya : confining
cha : and
moordhani : forehead
aadhaaya : establish
praanam : praanaas
aasthita : situating
yogadhaaranaam : in yogic concentration

Shri Krishna describes the technique meditating upon the name of Ishvara in this shloka. He outlines a series of steps which are similar to the detailed analysis of meditation found in the sixth chapter. Four steps are presented here: controlling the organs of sense perception, reducing the number of thoughts to one, directing the life force or praana, and continuing to remain in this state of concentration for an extended period of time.

The first step is to control the organs of sense perception referred to here as "gates". In meditation, we are advised to select a spot where there is minimal distraction so that the mind does not rush out into the external world towards a sound, image or smell.

The second step is to "confine the mind within the heart". This means that we have to slowly reduce the number of thoughts to one thought using japa meditation, for instance. No other thought should enter the mind except the object of meditation.

The third and fourth steps require the oversight and training of an experienced master. For the sake of completeness, let's examine them anyway. An advanced yogi has the ability to control his praana or life force so that it could be focused in one part of the body. Here, such a yogi is asked to focus his life force in the forehead. Once this happens, the yogi is asked to maintain this position for an extended period of time. Such intense meditation requires tremendous effort and practice.

So then, assuming we are armed with the technique of meditation on Ishvara's name, what name should we use? This is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 8

*omityekaaksharam brahma vyaaharanmaamnusmaran |
yaha prayaati tyajandeham sa yaati paramaam gatim || 13 ||*

He who departs the body while chanting Om, which is the one-syllable (name of) brahman, and also remembers me, he attains the supreme state.

The sound "Om" has been praised in the scriptures as an indicator of brahman, the eternal essence. Shri Krishna concludes the second technique of meditation, meditation on the name of Ishvara, by saying that one who performs meditation on the sound of Om attains Ishvara during the time of departure.

Like we saw in the previous instance, the symbolic meaning of this shloka also uses death as a metaphor to indicate death of the ego. Therefore, meditation on the sound of Om helps the seeker sever his connection to the finite ego and take him towards the infinite eternal essence.

The key thing, however, is to associate the sound "Om" to our understanding of Ishvara. In other words, meditation on the sound of Om without associating it to our favourite deity will not yield any result. In fact, Adi Shankaraachaarya in his commentary says that meditation on Om should only be performed by one who has diligently heard ("shravana") and analyzed ("mananam") the knowledge of the eternal essence. This is why Shri Krishna adds "remember me as Ishvara" to the instruction that we chant Om.

To recap, the first technique was meditation upon the grand cosmic form of Ishvara, and the second technique was meditation upon Om. However, both techniques require us to develop control of our praanaas. Recognizing this, Shri Krishna provides an easier third technique in the next shloka.

om : Om
iti : this
ekaaksharam : one-syllable
brahma : brahman
vyaaharan : chanting
maam : my
anusmaran : remembrance
yaha : he who
prayaati : departs
tyajan : leaving
deham : body
saha : he
yaati : attains
paramaam : supreme
gatim : state

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 8

*ananyachetaahaa satatam yo maam smarati nityashaha |
tasyaaham sulabhaha paartha nityayuktasya yoginaha || 14 ||*

One who thinks of me with a focused mind, without interruption, I become effortlessly available to that yogi that is constantly engaged (in me).

ananyachetaahaa : focused mind
satatam : always
yaha : one who
maam : me
smarati : remembers
nityashaha : without interruption
tasya : he
aham : I
sulabhaha : effortless
paartha : O Paartha
nityayuktasya : constantly engaged
yoginaha : yogi

Shri Krishna provides us with the simplest method of gaining access to Ishvara in this shloka. He says that no special technique is required. All that is needed is that the seeker focus his mind on Ishvara, perform duties as per his svadharma but think about Ishvara all the time, without interruption.

The key point, however, is the phrase "without interruption". We had seen earlier that there is one thought that all of us have in the back of our minds. For some it is family, for some it is career and so on. It is like the drone of a "taanpura" in Indian classical music. Shri Krishna says that unless we make Ishvara that constant background thought, we will not attain him. Just performing a 30 minute meditation on Ishvara will not yield anything.

Ishvara is very well aware that most of us do not give him top priority. This is famously depicted in the image of Lord Vitthala, a deity of Lord Vishnu from Maharashtra. He is portrayed as standing with hands on his waist as if to say "I have been waiting here for a long time, when will you come?" This is due to our preoccupation with worldly matters. A deep-seated attraction towards spiritual knowledge, combined with blows from the world, will slowly but surely move the seeker towards constant meditation upon Ishvara.

So therefore, Shri Krishna has provided a simple and straightforward method to attain Ishvara : keep Ishvara as the constant thought but do your duty. It not require us to perform any kind of specialized yogic meditation. What happens when we follow this path? This is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 8

*maamupetya punarjanma duhkhaalayamashaashvatam |
naapnuvanti mahaatmaanaha samsiddhim paramaam gataaha || 15 ||*

maam : me
upetya : having obtained
punarjanma : rebirth
duhkhaalayam : abode of sorrow
ashaashvatam : transient
na : do not
aapnuvanti : they attain
mahaatmaanaha : esteemed individuals
samsiddhim : success
paramaam : supreme
gataaha : goal

Having obtained me, these esteemed do not attain rebirth, the transient abode of sorrow. They attain the goal of supreme success.

What happens if we diligently meditate upon Ishvara while performing our duties? Shri Krishna provides the answer in this shloka. He says that such people do not attain rebirth after they die. They attain something much higher - they attain Ishvara himself.

First, let us examine how Shri Krishna describes our present condition. Our worldly existence is transient, which means that there is no sense of permanence. Look at our body. It grows from a small baby all the way into adulthood and old age. There is not one moment where it is the same. Similarly, all aspects of our life are impermanent. Therefore, Shri Krishna summarizes our existence in one word "duhkhaalaya" or abode of sorrow. It is a constant quest for happiness through impermanence, which is like trying to hold on to a bubble.

Most people are well entrenched in this pursuit thinking that it is normal. But some have figured out the fallacy in this pursuit and begun their journey towards Ishvara. They are referred to as "mahaatmaas" or esteemed individuals in this shloka. Those who sincerely pursue this path attain the supreme goal : Ishvara himself. If we get Ishvara, we will not get revisit the world ever again. It is like waking up from a dream - we will not get to go back. So if we hold on to the world, we will never get Ishvara. It is an either/or situation.

So therefore, once we decide that our goal is Ishvara, and develop dispassion or vairagya towards the world, we should diligently pursue karma yoga combined with meditation as prescribed by Shri Krishna in the Gita. Here, Shri Krishna concludes the topic of attainment of Ishvara through meditation. The next topic around creation and dissolution of the universe is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 8

*aabhramhabhuvanaalokaahaa punaraavartinorjuna |
maamupetya tu kaunteya punarjanma na vidyate || 16 ||*

O Arjuna, all worlds including the abode of Brahma (are subject to) return. But having obtained me, O Kaunteya, rebirth does not occur.

aabhramhabhuvanaat : including the
abode of brahma
lokaahaa : all worlds
punaraavartinaha : return
arjuna : O Arjuna
maam : me
upetya : having obtained
tu : but
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
punarjanma : rebirth
na : does not
vidyate : occur

According to the scriptures, there exist heavens or worlds subtler than our visible universe. All beings on this earth who perform meritorious deeds go to one of those heavens after death. The abode of Lord Brahma (Brahma-loka) is considered the highest among the heavens. Shri Krishna says that all beings who end up in these heavens, including the world of Lord Brahma, do not stay there permanently. They have to return to earth at some point. Only those who attain Ishvara gain permanent liberation.

The first half of the shloka is applicable to seekers who perform karma yoga diligently and worship Ishvara as well. Depending upon the sincerity of their deeds and worship, they will attain the appropriate heaven. A select few attain the abode of Lord Brahma which is the highest possible heaven. Here, it is said that the residents only enjoy pleasure. There is no sorrow or suffering whatsoever.

Once they attain the abode of Lord Brahma, they are faced with a choice. They can continue to remain interested in pleasure seeking, or attain liberation. Attainment of Ishvara is the same as liberation. If they continue to remain interested in pleasure seeking, if they think of Brahma loka as yet another realm of space and time, they will eventually come back to earth and start life all over again. If they are interested in liberation, they will attain it when Brahma loka is dissolved along with all of the other worlds. This kind of liberation is called "krama mukti".

Now, the questions arises, why do all of these worlds end? The topic of cosmic creation and dissolution is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 8

*sahastrayugaparyantamaharyadbrahmano viduhu |
raatrim yugasahastraantaam tehoraatravido janaahaa || 17 ||*

They who know the day of Brahma comprising a thousand yugaas, the night of Brahma comprising a thousand yugaas, those people know day and night.

sahastra : thousand
yuga : yugaas
paryantam : until
ahaha : one day
yat : they who
brahmanaha : of Brahma
viduhu : know
raatrim : one night
yuga : yugaas
sahastraantaam : thousand
te : those
ahoraatravidaha : know day and night
janaahaa : people

We now enter into the topic of cosmic creation with this shloka. Before the topic is taken up, Shri Krishna introduces some words here as a way of introduction. The new words introduced here are sahastra and yuga. Although not mentioned explicitly, we shall also look at the four yugas or ages that are part of the cosmic creation: satya yuga, treta yuga, dvaapara yuga and kali yuga.

The cycle of creation is said to begin with satyayuga or the age of truth. It is followed by the treta yuga and the dvaapara yuga. The last yuga is kali yuga or the age of discord, which is the current yuga. Kali yuga is the shortest yuga comprising 432,000 years. Dvaapara is twice that long, treta is thrice that long, and satya yuga is four times that long. Therefore, the total time of creation is ten times 432,000, which is 4.32 million years. This period of creation is also known as chatur-yuga.

Now, having understood the length of chatur yuga, we can calculate the length of Brahma's day and night. Shri Krishna says that one day of Lord Brahma equals one thousand yugaas. The interpretation of the word yuga here is traditionally taken to mean a chatur-yuga. So then, a day of Brahma equals one thousand times 4.32 million, which is 4.32 billion years. This is also the length of one night of Lord Brahma.

Let us know dig deeper into the symbolic meaning of this shloka. There are two aspects we need to look at. First, this shloka re-emphasizes that every action we perform always bears fruit, but not necessarily in the current lifetime.

We may try and try very hard, but the result of our action may not show up in this lifetime, it may bear fruit in another lifetime. Alternatively, we may sometimes get into situations that we think we do not deserve. These could be favourable situations (an unexpected financial windfall) or unfavourable situations (a natural disaster). These

type of results are due to actions we have performed in a prior lifetime.

The second aspect is to do with the cultivation of dispassion or vairagya towards this world. We perform actions in this world not just for immediate gain, but also to leave behind a legacy, leave behind something that future generations will remember us by. It could be wealth, power, prestige and so on. But in effect, Shri Krishna tells us that nothing will last forever. Everything will eventually end, if not now then certainly in 4.32 billion years. So if this is going to be the case, it is better to cultivate dispassion right now so that we can proceed spiritually.

How exactly does the universe come into being and dissolve? This is explained next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 8

*avyaktaadvyaktayaha sarvaahaa prabhavantyaharaagame |
raatryaagame praleeyante tatraivaavyaktasangyake || 18 ||*

avyaktaat : from the unmanifest
vyaktayaha : manifest
sarvaahaa : entire
prabhavanti : produced
ahaha : day
aagame : start
raatrya : night
agame : start
praleeyante : dissolution
tatra : that
eva : only
avyakta : unmanifest
sangyake : called

With the start of day, the entire manifest (universe) is produced from the unmanifest. With the start of night, it is dissolved into that which is called the unmanifest.

Shri Krishna explains the process of cosmic creation in this shloka. When the day of Lord Brahma begins, the entire universe comprising all living and non-living entities wakes up and begins to act. This process continues until the end of his day. Then, the whole universe goes back into the same unmanifest state that it sprung from. Alternatively, the whole universe is born out of Lord Brahma (the unmanifest), and goes back into him.

We can understand this shloka using the analogy of the movie theatre from the beginning of this shloka. The entire animated movie lies unmanifest in the reel of film. When the movie begins, someone loads the film into the projector and turns the projector on. Then, the bright white movie screen comes alive with all the characters in the movie. When the reel of film ends, all the movie characters are "dissolved" from the white screen. This process is repeated next time, and so on and so forth.

Now let us examine the implications. The universe is never really destroyed. It goes into a state of suspended animation, only to be "unfrozen" when the next day of Lord Brahma begins. This is consistent with the law of conservation of energy and matter. Neither energy nor matter is created or destroyed. They just transform from one state to another.

If we know this, and if we also know that every action that we perform always yields a result sooner or later, we realize that the universe works on a set of well-defined laws. Nothing is random, everything is an effect of some earlier cause. Therefore, we can begin to develop the right set of expectations towards the world. Then, while performing actions in a spirit of karma yoga, we will know that only performance of actions is in our hand. The universe, with its set of in-built laws, will take care of the rest. There is no room for worry.

Now, do the living and non-living being have a choice in this process of creation and dissolution? We shall see in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 8

*bhootagraamaha sa evaayam bhootvaa bhootvaa praleeyate |
raatryaagamevashaha paartha prabhavatyaharaagame || 19 ||*

That (same) collection of beings, which was created repeatedly, helplessly dissolves during the night, O Paartha, and is (again) created during the day.

bhootagraamaha : community of beings
saha : that
eva : only
ayam : this
bhootvaa : having been created repeatedly
praleeyate : dissolves
raatryaagame : during the night
avashaha : helplessly
paartha : O Paartha
prabhavati : created
aharaagame : during the day

Previously, we learned about the process of cosmic creation, where all the living and non-living beings in the universe become manifest at the beginning of the day of Brahma. Now, Shri Krishna elaborates on the dissolution aspect. He says that all those beings go into an unmanifest or "frozen" state during the night of Lord Brahma. The very same beings become manifest or "un-frozen" again, when the day of Lord Brahma begins.

As we saw earlier, nothing is ever created or destroyed. The very same set of beings becomes manifest and unmanifest. The total number of "beings" in the universe remains the same. Those who die are "born" into a different form. Forms change but the total amount of universal "stuff" remains the same. It is said that there are 8.4 million species, which are nothing but forms. The movie ends, the reel is rewound, and it begins all over again, on and on, without any end in sight.

Now, here is one word in this shloka that deserves further attention. It is "avashaha" which means helplessly. Shri Krishna says that all beings, even if they are plants, animals, minerals or humans are helplessly stuck in this wheel of birth and rebirth, otherwise known as the wheel of samsaara. If they do not actively pursue a spiritual path, whatever that path may be, they will never come out of this cycle.

Most of us get frustrated if we get stuck in an elevator for more than a few minutes. Imagine how frustrated we should get if we find out that we are stuck somewhere for an infinite amount of time. So how exactly do we escape from this situation? We shall see in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 8

*parasmaattu bhaavonyovyaktaatsanaatanaha |
yaha sa sarveshu bhooteshu nashyatsu na vinashyati || 20 ||*

But, there exists another supreme, timeless unmanifest, beyond that (other) unmanifest, which, after destruction of all beings, is not destroyed.

Previously, Shri Krishna spoke about the endless cycle of creation and dissolution of the universe. All living and non-living beings go into a state of suspended animation for 4.32 billion years, after which they come back into manifest mode for another 4.32 billion years. But there is one more thing. There are a select few beings that escape this endless cycle. They are the ones who are liberated.

Let us go back to our example of the movie projector where the light that illuminates the film strip identified itself with a character in the movie. How does that piece of light get liberated? By knowing that the identification with the movie character is false, and the identification with the light is real. The light in the projector remains constant regardless of how many times the movie is shown and rewound. It transcends the movie.

Similarly, Shri Krishna informs us that there is something beyond this cycle of creation and dissolution, something that transcends time and space. In other words, everything in this world is transitory and will eventually lead to sorrow. Unless we realize that everything that we think will give us happiness is subject to destruction sooner or later, we will never become aware that there is something beyond our materialistic pursuits.

So, what exactly is this "another unmanifest"? This is taken up next.

paraha : supreme
tasmaat : that
tu : but
bhaavaha : exists
anyaha : another
avyaktaha : unmanifest
avyaktaat : unmanifest
sanaatanaha : timeless
yaha : that
saha : which
sarveshu : all
bhooteshu : beings
nashyatsu : after destruction
na : does not
vinashyati : destroyed

Bhagavad Gita Verse 21, Chapter 8

*avyaktokshara ityuktastamaahuhu paramaam gatim |
yam praapya na nivartante taddhaama paramam mama || 21 ||*

He who is called unmanifest and imperishable, he who has been spoken of as the supreme goal; having attained him (beings) do not return, that is my supreme abode.

Earlier in this chapter, Shri Krishna had mentioned that those who attain Ishvara are not subject to further rebirth. In this shloka, he says that the "another unmanifest" that remains unaffected by the day and night of Lord Brahma is nothing but Ishvara. He also mentions the nature of Ishvara as imperishable, unmanifest and supreme.

With this shloka, we come back to the main theme that began in chapter seven - Ishvara. After having explained that this universe is subject to cycles of creation and dissolution, and that unless we take effort, we are stuck in this infinite cycle, Shri Krishna reiterates the need for the pursuit of Ishvara as the means of liberation.

So therefore, for the seeker who performs karma yoga and upaasanaa or devotion towards Ishvara attains Ishvara after he has completed his time on earth and in the abode of Lord Brahma. Shri Krishna summarizes the means of attaining Ishvara in the next shloka, which also concludes the topic of liberation from rebirth.

avyaktaha : unmanifest
aksharaha : imperishable
iti : in this manner
uktaha : has been called
tam : he
aahuhu : spoken
paramaam : supreme
gatim : goal
yam : he who
praapya : having attained
na : do not
nivartante : return
tat : that
dhaama : abode
paramam : supreme
mama : my

Bhagavad Gita Verse 22, Chapter 8

*purushaha sa paraha paartha bhaktyaa labhyastvananyayaa |
yasyaantahasthaani bhootaani yena sarvamidam tatam || 22 ||*

purushaha : person
saha : that
paraha : supreme
paartha : O Paartha
bhaktyaa : with devotion
labhyaha : obtained
ananyayaa : single pointed
yasya : in whom
antahasthaani : are included
bhootaani : all beings
yena : by whom
sarvam : all
idam : this
tatam : pervaded

That supreme person, in whom all beings are included, by whom all this is pervaded, O Paartha, is obtained through single-pointed devotion.

With this shloka, Shri Krishna summarizes the topic of liberation. The detail around the creation and dissolution of the universe was meant to highlight the notion that only through liberation can we rise above that endless cycle. Shri Krishna gives us the means for liberation as well as the attributes of the goal which is Ishvara.

Shri Krishna says that liberation is obtained through single-pointed devotion to Ishvara. Single-pointed devotion was covered in chapter six. However, here it is meant to include not just devotion but also karma yoga. If the karma yoga aspect is missing, our vaasanaas or latent desires will remain unfulfilled, pulling us back into the cycle of rebirth so that they will be fulfilled.

Now, what is Ishvara's connection to creation and dissolution? Ultimately, Ishvara is the cause of all creation. But he is not someone who stands outside his creation. The classic example referenced in this context is that of the potter and the pot. The potter creates the pot out of clay, but remains outside the pot, distinct from the pot. Ishvara is not like that. He is like the ocean that creates waves. The waves are pervaded by the ocean and are also included in the ocean. So is the case with Ishvara. Therefore, Ishvara is everywhere (beyond space) and

ever present (beyond time).

Having conclude the topic of liberation, Shri Krishna begins the last topic of this chapter in the next shloka. He describes the two paths that seekers have to travel through after they pass away.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 23, Chapter 8

yatra kaale tvanaavrittimaavrittim chaiva yoginaha |
prayaataa yaanti tam kaalam vakshyaami bharatarshabha || 23 ||

But, (there exists) the path of no return for a yogi who is leaving his body, and also the path of return, I shall speak about those, O scion of the Bharatas.

yatra : which
 kaale : path
 tu : but
 anaavrittim : no return
 aavrittim : return
 cha : and
 eva : also
 yoginaha : a yogi
 prayaataa : one who is leaving the body
 yaanti : obtains
 tam : that
 kaalam : path
 vakshyaami : I will speak
 bharatarshabha : O scion of the Bharatas

With this shloka, Shri Krishna commences a new topic. He provides details around the journey of the jeeva after death.

As we have seen earlier, that journey differs from person to person. It is determined solely by two things : how we have acted and how we have thought. In other words, our actions and our thoughts in this life decide what happens in our next life. In this chapter, Shri Krishna has spoken about two kinds of people.

The first category of people are those who perform good actions in their lives. The second category of people are those who are solely devoted to Ishvara, in addition to performing good actions. This is Shri Krishna speaks about two paths in this shloka. Each category travels on a different path after death.

In the next two shlokas, each of these paths is explained in further detail. One path leads to liberation, which means that those who attain this path do not come back, they are not born again. The other path leads to rebirth or return.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 24, Chapter 8

*agnijyotiraha shuklaha shanmaasaa uttaraayanam |
tatra prayaataa gachhanti brahma brahma vido janaahaa || 24 ||*

Fire, light, day, the bright (fortnight of the month), the northern movement comprising six months; those people who have departed through that path, knowers of brahman attain brahman.

agnihi : fire
jyotihi : light
ahaha : day
shuklaha : bright
shanmaasaa : comprising six months
uttaraayanam : northern movement
tatra : through that path
prayaataa : one who has departed the body
gachhanti : attain
brahma : brahman
brahmanvidaha : knowers of brahman
janaahaa : people

Shri Krishna describes the journey that the individual soul or jeeva takes after death in this and the next shloka. Each jeeva is allocated one of two paths based on its actions while on this earth. Here, he speaks about the path taken by those who have practiced single-pointed devotion to Ishvara, indicated by the phrase "knowers of brahman".

It is said that Ishvara has appointed special deities to guide the jeeva to the abode of Lord Brahma after its body has ceased to function. Agni, jyoti, shukla and uttaraayan are symbols that indicate the deities who preside over fire, light, the lunar fortnight and the six month period between winter and summer. The jeeva resides in Lord Brahma's abode until dissolution, after which it is liberated. In other words, it "attains brahman".

In India, Uttaraayana is considered highly auspicious. Its beginning is celebrated with the Makar Sankranti festival. The lunar fortnight of each month is also the time in which most Indian festivals are celebrated including Navaratri and Guru Purnima.

Next, Shri Krishna described the second path that jeevas take after death.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 25, Chapter 8

*dhoomo raatristathaa krishnaha shanmaasaa dakshinaayanam |
tatra chaandramasam jyotiryogi praapya nivartate || 25 ||*

Smoke, night, darkness and the southern movement comprising six months; the yogi (travels through) that path, attains the light of the moon, to return.

dhoomaha : smoke
raatrihi : night
tathaa : and
krishnaha : darkness
shanmaasaa : comprising six months
dakshinaayanam : southern movement
tatra : through that path
chaandramasam : of the moon
jyotihi : light
yogi : yogi
praapya : attains
nivartate : return

We saw earlier that jeevas who have practised single-pointed devotion travel on the path of light, attain the abode of Lord Brahma, and eventually achieve liberation. Now, Shri Krishna describes the path of the jeeva who has performed good deeds in its lifetime, but had not practiced devotion. This path is called the path of the moon or the lunar path.

The jeeva is guided on this path by the deities who preside over the smoke of the pyre, night, the dark lunar fortnight and the six months between summer and winter. Having travelled through the lunar path, these jeevas attain a lower realm called Chandraloka or the abode of the moon. In modern language, this is nothing but heaven. The jeeva enjoys heavenly pleasures, which are the fruits of its earthly actions. Unlike the jeeva in Lord Brahma's abode, this jeeva returns to earth once the fruits of its good actions have depleted.

Both the dark lunar fortnight and the period between summer and winter are relatively less auspicious than their brighter counterparts. But many festivals including Maha Shivratri and Krishna Janmaash-tami are celebrated during the dark lunar fortnight.

Shri Krishna summarizes the difference between the two paths in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 26, Chapter 8

*shuklakrishne gatee hyote jagataha shaashvate mate |
ekayaa yaatyanaavrittimanyayaavartate punaha || 26 ||*

For, bright and dark, both these paths have been known since eternity. By one, the traveller does not have to return, by the other, he has to return again.

shuklakrishne : bright and dark
gatee : paths
hi : for
ete : both these
jagataha : worldly
shaashvate : eternal
mate : have been known
ekayaa : one of these
yaati : traveller
anaavrittim : does not have to return
anyayaa : the other
aavartate : has to return
punaha : again

Shri Krishna spoke about two paths that the jeeva takes after death: the "bright" path that goes to the abode of Lord Brahma, and the "dark" path that goes to the abode of the moon. He now reaffirms the difference between these two paths by saying that those who travel by the bright path are liberated, whereas those who take the dark path are born again after spending time in the abode of the moon. He also states that these paths have been established since time immemorial.

These two paths take care of two categories of people. One category is those who perform good actions as well as single pointed devotion - they attain the abode of Lord Brahma. The other is those who only perform good actions - they attain heaven. But absent from this list are those who perform negative actions that harm others and themselves. What happens to them?

Shri Krishna has omitted the path of such people, probably because he assumes that one who is interested in following the path of karma yoga is putting forth effort to eliminate negative and destructive actions from his life. More information on the path taken by such people is provided in the Srimad Bhagavatam.

So then, what is the significance of these two paths to us? This is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 27, Chapter 8

naite srutee paartha jaananyogee muhyati kashchana |
tasmaatsarveshu kaaleshu yogayukto bhavaarjuna || 27 ||

**Knowing both these paths, any yogi is not deluded, O Paartha.
 Therefore, remain engaged in yoga at all times, O Arjuna.**

na : not
 ete : both
 srutee : paths
 paartha : O Paartha
 jaanan : knower
 yogee : yogi
 muhyati : deluded
 kashchana : any
 tasmaat : therefore
 sarveshu : at all
 kaaleshu : times
 yogayuktaha : engaged in yoga
 bhava : remain
 arjuna : O Arjuna

Shri Krishna starts to conclude the topic of the jeeva's journey after death. He says that those who have knowledge of the fate of the jeeva after death is not deluded or misinformed. With this knowledge, we can change his behavior on earth in order to qualify for the right path after our death.

Of the two paths mentioned in this chapter, there was one that led to liberation. Shri Krishna advises us to follow the path of selfless action combined with single pointed devotion, in other words, karma yoga and bhakti yoga. This is indicated by the phrase "remain engaged in yoga" in this shloka.

All of this knowledge has already been explained to us. Karma yoga was the theme of the first six chapters, and bhakti yoga is the theme of chapters six through twelve. We have a choice. We can either read those chapters with an intellectual bent, or we can actually put the teachings to practice in our lives by remaining engaged in yoga "at all times". The choice is up to us.

Shri Krishna summarizes and concludes this chapter in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 28, Chapter 8

*vedeshu yajneshu tapahasu chaiva daaneshu yatpunyaphalam pradishtam |
 atyeti tatsarvamidam veditvaa yogee param sthaanamupaiti chaadyam || 28
 ||*

Whatever auspicious results have been indicated in the Vedas, rituals, austerities and also in charity, the yogi transcends all these having known this (knowledge), and attains the primal supreme state.

Shri Krishna concludes the eighth chapter with this shloka. He tells us that he has spelled out an entire "flowchart for the afterlife". With this knowledge, we have the means to achieve anything including heaven, rebirth and liberation. The outcome solely depends upon our behaviour while we are alive.

Traditionally, seekers used the instructions in the Vedas to perform rituals, austerities and charity. Many of them did so with the goal of attaining a better state in the afterlife. In our case, even though we may not perform rituals per se, our goal is similar. We try to do good actions and charity so that we can earn "punya" or merit for the afterlife. However, we know know that mere performance of good actions will get us to heaven, but we will eventually come back once our merits are exhausted.

Therefore, Shri Krishna recommends the bright path of devotion and action that leads us to the abode of Lord Brahma, and eventually into liberation. This path of graduated liberation, indicated by the phrase "supreme primal state" is also known as "krama mukti". One who achieves this path transcends, or goes beyond the results of heaven, because he attains liberation which frees him from finitude.

Shri Krishna is not done yet. There is yet another path of liberation that is his personal favourite. We shall learn more in the coming chapters.

<i>om tatsatiti shrimadbhagavadgitasu upanishadsu brahnavidyayaam
 yogashastre shrikrishnaarjunasamvade

aksharabrahmayogonaamo ashtamodhyaahaha || 8 |</i>

vedeshu : in Vedas
 yajneshu : in rituals
 tapahasu : in austerities
 cha : and
 eva : also
 daaneshu : in charity
 yat : whatever
 punya : auspicious
 phalam : results
 pradishtam : have been indicated
 atyeti : transcends
 tat : these
 sarvam : all
 idam : this
 veditvaa : having known
 yogee : yogi
 param : supreme
 sthaanam : state
 upaiti : attains
 cha : and
 aadyam : primal

Summary of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 8

In the seventh chapter, Shri Krishna gave a detailed description of Ishvara, and stressed the importance of recognizing the infinite aspect of Ishvara. The eighth chapter took a bit of a detour from that topic. In the beginning of this chapter, Arjuna raised seven questions that Shri Krishna answered in this chapter. The key question was : "how does one attain Ishvara after death" which became the main topic of this chapter.

Shri Krishna began this topic by asserting that the thought of the time of death determines our fate. If that thought is of Ishvara, we will attain Ishvara. Since we will not know when our death occurs, he advised us to meditate upon our Ishvara throughout our life so it automatically becomes our final thought. To help us cultivate this thought, Shri Krishna elaborated upon three types of meditation.

The first type of meditation was on the cosmic form of Ishvara and the second type was on the name of Ishvara, which is Om. Both these meditation techniques also required us to exercise control of our prana or life forces. Since this is beyond most of our capabilities, Shri Krishna recommended the third type of meditation which was much simpler. He advised us to remember Ishvara in any form, but do so constantly throughout our life.

So then, what happens when we die? Shri Krishna said that the universe is like an infinite cycle of creation and dissolution, symbolically depicted as the day and night of Lord Brahma. Both day and night are each 4.32 billion years long. At the end of each day of Lord Brahma, all living and non-living beings become unmanifest. When the night of Lord Brahma ends, all those beings are manifest again. In other words, they are "frozen" at the end of the day and they "thaw" in the beginning of the day. This goes on infinitely.

Having known this, our state is pitiable. We are caught in this endless cycle of creation and dissolution. Only those beings who only put forth the effort come out of this endless cycle. They attain Ishvara transcends this cycle. So, urging us to take steps towards achieving liberation is the refrain of this chapter, and of the Gita as a whole.

Towards the end of the chapter, Shri Krishna enumerated the two paths that a jeeva or soul takes after death. The first path is the dark path which is attained by those who have performed good actions on this earth. They attain the abode of the moon (heaven). After exhausting the results of their actions, they return to this world and are reborn.

The second path is the bright path which is attained by those who have practised devoted meditation on Ishvara in addition to performing good actions. They attain the abode of Lord Brahma and remain there until its dissolution when they are eventually liberation. We are encouraged to take up this path.



Raja Vidya Raja Guhya Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 9**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**idam tu te guhyatamam pravakshyaamyanasooyave |**jnyaanam vijnyaanasahitam yajnyaatvaa mokshayaseshubhaat || 1 ||*

Shree Bhagavaan said: However, to you who is without fault, I will teach this extremely secret knowledge along with wisdom, having known which, you will be liberated from the inauspicious.

idam : this
 tu : however
 te : to you
 guhyatamam : extremely secret
 pravakshyaami : I will teach
 anasooyave : faultless
 jnyaanam : knowledge
 vijnyaana : wisdom
 sahitam : along with
 yat : which
 jnyaatvaa : having known
 mokshayase : you will be liberated
 ashubhaat : inauspicious

Shri Krishna uses this chapter to progress the theme of the seventh chapter, which was the infinite nature of Ishvara and the finite nature of maaya. He begins the chapter by asserting that the knowledge of Ishvara's infinite nature will result in liberation. He addresses Arjuna as "anasooya" which means without fault, doubt or prejudice, indicating that those who have begun the process of purification of their minds through karma yoga and devoted meditation will understand this knowledge completely.

First, let us understand the result of knowledge that Shri Krishna is glorifying in this shloka. It is going to give us freedom or liberation from the inauspicious. The word inauspicious in this shloka refers to samsaara or the endless cycle of creation and dissolution that all of us are trapped in.

Next, let us look at what makes this knowledge unique. Shri Krishna says that he is going to reveal not just "jnyaana" or knowledge, but also "vijnyana" or wisdom that we can internalize in our lives. Also, unlike other knowledge that requires action to give a result, this knowledge gives us the result of liberation all by itself. As an example, if we come to know that a mirage in a desert is false, we don't have to do anything further.

What makes this knowledge even more special is that it is extremely subtle. It is hard for someone to figure out on their own. We need a competent teacher like Shri Krishna to reveal this knowledge to us, as well as a competent student who is ready and unprejudiced. Shri Krishna, urging us to learn this knowledge in the right way through a teacher, calls it secret knowledge. It also shows the level of trust that Arjuna built with Shri Krishna in order to qualify for this knowledge.

Shri Krishna further glorifies this special knowledge in the next shloka.

Notes

1. Four things comprise ignorance or incorrect knowledge about our self. Doership, enjoyership, the notion of birth, death and rebirth, and the notion that the "I" in me has a different identity than the universe; all this is ignorance or avidya.
2. This ignorance is driven away by knowledge, which is the true nature of our self.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 9

*raajavidya raajaguhyam pavitramidamuttamam |
pratyakshaavagamam dharmyam susukham kartumavyayam || 2 ||*

raajavidya : royal knowledge
raajaguhyam : royal secret
pavitram : purifying
idam : this
uttamam : foremost
pratyaksha : immediate
avagamam : perception
dharmyam : righteousness
susukham : effortless
kartum : perform
avyayam : imperishable

This is royal knowledge, the royal secret, purifying, foremost, immediately perceived, righteous, effortless to perform, and imperishable.

Shri Krishna continues to glorify the theme of this chapter, which is the knowledge of Ishvara's infinite nature. This shloka consists of a series of adjectives that highlight the extremely unique and special nature of the knowledge that he is about to reveal.

He begins by describing this knowledge as royal. It means that this knowledge is the king among any knowledge, it is foremost among any other kind of knowledge. As we saw in an earlier chapter, most knowledge we acquire in our life is "aparaa vidyaa". It is related to something material and temporary. This chapter describes "paraa vidyaa", knowledge of the absolute. Knowing this, we will ourselves become kings. We will never become subservient to anyone or anything, including our mind, body and senses.

This knowledge is the king of secrets. Ordinary secrets can give us happiness, wealth, power, a competitive advantage and so on, all of which are temporary and limited. But this secret yields eternal, infinite happiness.

Many scriptures describe rituals that act as purifiers that help us eliminate our sins. But this knowledge is the ultimate purifier because it eliminates the sinner, the root cause. As we have seen earlier, our ego creates the sense of doership and enjoyership, resulting in accumulation of merits and sins. But if our sense of doership is eliminated, all of our actions will be spontaneous and in tune with Ishvara's will. The storehouse of our sins will be burnt away. Plus there will be no question of accumulating any more merits or sins.

Shri Krishna says that we will be able to immediately perceive or experience this knowledge. What does this mean? When we are a little hungry, we say "I think I am hungry". But if we have not eaten for a while day, we automatically say "I am hungry" without any further thinking. This is what is meant by immediate and direct perception.

There will be zero doubt in this knowledge.

This knowledge is aligned with dharma, the law that holds the universe together. Nowadays, many practices in the business world that were formerly legal are deemed illegal and vice versa. This happens because they are based on ever-changing laws. But this royal knowledge is in accordance with the universal law. It holds true at any point in time, anywhere in the world. Moreover, it will always result in joy, never in sorrow.

Finally, this knowledge is easy to assimilate, it does not require any special attributes in the person other than dedication and faith. While most things that take little effort yield temporary results, this knowledge results in permanent, eternal happiness.

Having provided a detailed description of the characteristics of this royal knowledge, Shri Krishna describes the fate of people who do not follow this teaching.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 9

*ashradyadhaanaahaa purushaa dharmasyaasya parantapa |
 apraapya maam nivartante mritusamsaaravartmani || 3 ||*

People who do not have faith in this prescription, O scorcher of foes, do not attain me. They return to the path of the mortal world.

<i>ashradyadhaanaahaa purushaa dharmasyaasya parantapa |

apraapya maam nivartante mritusamsaaravartmani || 3 ||</i>

People who do not have faith in this prescription, O scorcher of foes, do not attain me. They return to the path of the mortal world.

ashradyadhaanaahaa = not having faith in

purushaa = people

dharmasya = prescription

asya = this

parantapa = O scorcher of foes

apraapya = not attain

maam = me

nivartante = return

mrityu = mortal

samsaara = world

vartmani = path

Like any good teacher, Shri Krishna first glorifies the knowledge that he is about to teach, then points out the qualifications of the worthy student. Addressing Arjuna as the "scorcher of foes", he says that they key qualification required to receive this teaching is that of faith. If we do not have faith, we continue following our old ways, only to be

trapped in this endless cycle of creation and dissolution.

Why is there so much importance placed in faith? Without faith, we will not have the inclination to fully understand any teaching. Even in school or college, we will not take the extra effort to inquire, ask questions, read books and resolve our doubts unless we have faith in the subject and the teacher. It is even more important in this kind of knowledge.

So then, what happens to those that do not have faith? Shri Krishna says that such people do not attain Ishvara. They have faith in their sense organs and their corresponding sense pleasures. These people still think that feeding their senses with more food, entertainment as well as bodily and intellectual comforts will result in long-lasting happiness. This misplaced faith further ensnares them in the path of the mortal world, which that of birth, old age, disease and death, over and over again.

Having sufficiently introduced the chapter, Shri Krishna delivers the main message of this chapter in the following two shlokas.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 9

*mayaa tatamidam sarvam jagadavyaktamoortinaa |
matsthaani sarva bhootaani na chaaham teshvavasthitaha || 4 ||*

This entire universe is pervaded by my unmanifest state. All beings are based in me, I am not based in them.

This shloka and the next are the crux of the teaching in this chapter. Shri Krishna makes three core points: that the entire universe is pervaded by his unmanifest state, that all beings are based in him, and that he is not based in them. Let us first take a step back to understand the context of this teaching before we delve into these three points.

The eighth chapter described meditative techniques that we had to follow throughout our lives in order to attain Ishvara, so that we can be liberated from the cycle of creation and dissolution. Now, Shri Krishna reveals a secret that will enable us to immediately gain access to Ishvara 24/7. And unlike other techniques described so far, we do not have to do any action. We just have to know.

What is this secret knowledge? Let us start with the first point. Shri Krishna says that Ishvara is present in every living and non-living being within this universe. If that's the case, then we do not need to put in any extra effort. Once we train ourselves to view Ishvara in everything, we will gain access to him 24/7. We will not need to do any extra physical or mental activity to make that happen. But if it were that simple, why cannot we put it into practice immediately? It is because we have been preconditioned since time immemorial to see everything but Ishvara. Removing this preconditioning is the topic of the Gita.

The second point made by Shri Krishna is that all beings are based in him. Let us bring up the example of the ocean and the waves to understand this point. A five year old girl sitting on the beach will look at the waves, the foam and the ripples and conclude that they are independent things. But her mother knows that all of those shapes are created because of the ocean. Also, the girl who has to inquire about where these shapes come from. The mother does not have to do anything. She just knows that everything is nothing but water in the ocean. So the mother will tell her, "that's just the ocean".

mayaa : my
tatam : pervaded
idam : this
sarvam : entire
jagat : universe
avyakta : unmanifest
moortinaa : state
matsthaani : based in me
sarva : all
bhootaani : beings
na : not
cha : and
aham : I
teshu : in them
avasthitaha : based

Now, let's say the girl sees a ripple in a lake instead of the ocean. She points to it and says "that's the ocean". The mother will now enhance her statement slightly by saying "that is not the ocean, that is a ripple. It is just a shape taken by water, which is in the ocean and in the lake". Water is an abstract concept which a child slowly learns by example.

Similarly, we may begin to think that Ishvara is resident in an idol, or a saint, or a holy place. Like the ripple, they are names and forms. Even Arjuna would have found it hard to believe that Shri Krishna, who is in front of him, can pervade the entire universe. So therefore, Shri Krishna says that no visible entity can ever contain Ishvara who is beyond name and form. The true nature of Ishvara is formless. This is the third point in this shloka.

Still, a question remains. Just like we still see waves in the ocean even after knowing that they are water, we still come across thousands of names and forms everyday. Many of those names and forms are people that we interact with, speak with, work with and so on. Aren't those people "real"? How do we reconcile this? Shri Krishna addresses this confusion in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 9

na cha matsthaani bhootaani pashya me yogamaishvaram |
bhootabhrinna cha bhootastho mamaatmaa bhootabhaavanaha || 5 ||

**But, neither do all beings reside in me. Behold my divine yoga!
 I am the sustainer and creator of all beings, but my self is not contained in (those) beings.**

Shri Krishna takes the argument of the prior shloka one step further. He says that what we see through our eyes, hear through our nose, touch through our skin is just a series of names and forms. It is a divine power of Ishvara, just like the skill of a magician. These names and forms appear as if they are created, sustained and destroyed by Ishvara, but in reality, there is no such thing.

We notice that the first statement "all beings do not reside in me" contradicts the statement in the last shloka "all beings are based in me." This is because each statement is made from a different perspective, based on our level of understanding.

If we think that the world of names and forms is real, then Ishvara says that all beings are based in him. It is like the little girl thinking that the foam and the waves in the ocean are real entities.

But, if we advance our understanding, if we know that the world of names and forms is a play of Ishvara, then he says that none of those beings, those names and forms, reside in him. The illusion of the magician does not reside in the magician, because an illusion cannot reside in something real. That is why Shri Krishna says that Ishvara's self is not contained in all beings.

Now, even though we have this knowledge, will still see, hear, touch, feel and taste the world. Those forms in the world will be created, survive, and eventually dissolve. Our near and dear ones will prosper, but will also leave us one day. All of this is a play of Ishvara's maayaa. To this end, he asserts that he is the creator and sustainer of these names and forms.

As an example, we look up at the sky and observe that it is blue in colour. We know that the blue colour is just an illusion caused by the scattering of light waves. However, even after we know this, our eyes

na : nor
 cha : but
 matsthaani : reside in me
 bhootaani : all beings
 pashya : behold
 me : my
 yogam : yoga
 aishvaram : divine
 bhootabhrin : sustainer of beings
 na : not
 cha : and
 bhootasthaha : contained in beings
 mama : my
 aatmaa : self
 bhootabhaavanaha : creator of beings

still report the color of the sky as blue. Similarly, Shri Krishna urges us to recognize that Ishvara's divine power of maayaa, his "home theatre system", creates all the names and forms that our lives are made up of.

So then, what is the essence of these two key shlokas? Our senses will always report names and forms to our mind and intellect. If we know that they are all illusory names and forms, we will gain liberation. If we get sucked into thinking that they are real, we will be trapped in their apparent reality.

This teaching requires further elaboration. To that end, Shri Krishna provides an illustration in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 6, Chapter 9

*yathaakaashasthito nityam vaayuhu sarvatrago mahaan |
tathaa sarvaani bhootaani matsthaaneetyupadhaaraya || 6 ||*

**Just like the mighty wind travels everywhere, established in space,
so too, all beings reside in me, understand this.**

yathaa : just like
aakaashasthitaha : established in space
nityam : eternally
vaayuhu : wind
sarvatragaha : travels everywhere
mahaan : mighty
tathaa : so do
sarvaani : all
bhootaani : beings
matsthaani : reside in me
iti : in this manner
upadhaaraya : understand this

The key teaching of the chapter is that Ishvara pervades everything, that all beings are sustained by Ishvara but Ishvara is not contained in any of them. To illustrate these statements, Shri Krishna compares Ishvara to space. He says that space enables everything to exist within it, like wind, for example. In the same way, all living and non-living entities dwell in Ishvara.

First, let us understand the nature of space. It is indivisible, which means that even if we try to divide it by building walls, we cannot do so. It does not get affected by what it contains. A flower generates fragrance when fresh and odour when it decays. But both those qualities do not get transferred to space, since space has no qualities. It also pervades everything. Over 99 pct of an atom is empty space. And it is infinite. No object can ever contain space.

Similarly, Shri Krishna says that Ishvara is infinite, indivisible, pervades everything, and remains unaffected by what he sustains. How does this help us? Knowing that Ishvara is everywhere reduces our sorrow, delusion, fear, likes and dislikes. If everything is Ishvara, and if we also know that we are in Ishvara, there is nothing to fear or like or dislike. That is how we get liberated.

There is a story in the Ishvaavaasya Upanishad. The gods tried to have a race with Ishvara. But wherever they ended up, Ishvara was already there. Another interpretation of this story is that the senses also tried to outrun Ishvara, but could not. It is like trying to race with space. It is a futile effort, because space is all-pervading. So is Ishvara.

Now, just like we see the blue sky with our eyes, we also see things and people on this earth being created and destroyed. We know that the blue colour is an illusion, but do we really understand that creation and dissolution is an illusion as well? This is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 9

*sarvabhootaani kaunteya prakritim yaanti maamikaam |
kalpakshaye punastaani kalpaadau visrijaamyaham || 7 ||*

sarvabhootaani : all beings
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
prakritim : Prakriti
yaanti : attain
maamikaam : my
kalpakshaye : end of an age
punaha : again
taani : them
kalpaadau : beginning of an age
visrijaami : project
aham : I

All beings attain my Prakriti when an age ends, O Kaunteya. I project them again when (another) age begins.

Previously, Shri Krishna compared wind in space to the multitude of beings in Ishvara. Here, he asserts that all those beings go to Ishvara's Prakriti at the end of a "kalpa" or age. They then come back into existence when the kalpa starts all over again.

In the last chapter, Shri Krishna had explained the process of creation and dissolution. He spoke about the day and night of Lord Brahma. Here, he adds more detail by revealing the orchestrator of creation and dissolution. It is Prakriti. In an earlier context, this word was translated as nature. In this context, we will keep the original word since the meaning is a little different.

Prakriti is a system that tracks the karmas or actions of each and every being in the universe. When every being's karma is exhausted, Shri Krishna, through the medium of Prakriti, begins the process of dissolution, just like we go to sleep when we exhaust all our actions for the day. When the time is right for the next set of actions to begin manifesting, Prakriti "wakes" up everyone and begins the process of creation.

Now, we notice that Shri Krishna does not use the word "create" here. Instead, he uses the word "project". Prakriti is similar to a movie projector in that it does not create anything new, but projects names and forms on the screen, just like waves and foam in the ocean. As we saw earlier, creation and dissolution is a matter of perspective. A child only sees waves and foam. The adult, seeing the very same waves and foam, knows that it is ultimately water.

Similarly, creation and dissolution on a cosmic scale is "real" only if we get stuck at the level of names and forms. The jnyaani or the wise seeker sees the names and forms come and go, but knows that everything, ultimately, is only Ishvara. The difference between the jnyaani and everyone else is that the wise seeker's perspective that comes from having the knowledge of Ishvara. This knowledge is paramount.

So then, what is the relationship between Ishvara, Prakriti and us?
This is explained in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 9

*prakritim svaamavashtabhya visrijaami punaha punaha |
bhootagraamimam kritsnamavasham prakritervashaat || 8 ||*

prakritim : Prakriti
svaam : my
avashtabhya : commanding
visrijaami : I project
punaha : repeatedly
bhootagraam : world of beings
imam : this
kritsnam : entire
avasham : helplessly
prakritehe : of Prakriti
vashaat : controlled by

Commanding my Prakriti, I repeatedly project this entire world of beings, which is helpless under the control of Prakriti.

Shri Krishna describes the workings of Prakriti in this shloka. Prakriti is Ishvara's projector. It projects an entire universe of names and forms at the beginning of a cycle, withdraws them at the end of the cycle, only to start it all over again. We saw this in the previous shlokas. Here, we investigate the relationship between Prakriti, Ishvara and the individual.

Let's first look at the relationship between Ishvara and Prakriti. Shri Krishna says that Ishvara fully controls Prakriti. He is the commander of Prakriti. Prakriti cannot do anything without the command of Ishvara. However, Ishvara is not a micro-manager. He does not tell Prakriti how to do its job. He just sets the rules in motion. Prakriti is a system that follows the rules, just like a computer program or the autopilot in an aircraft.

How does this work? We know that Prakriti, which is a synonym for maaya, comprises the three gunaas or modes. Each guna will deliver results based on its inherent property. For example, if our personality is predominantly comprised of rajas, we will always be in an agitated state, which will result in haphazard work. But if our personality is saatvic, it will result in perfect work. Notice that there is no need for Ishvara to "do" anything since Prakriti is an automatic system.

Next, let us look at the nature of Prakriti and the individual. Shri Krishna says that the individual is under the complete control of Prakriti. He helplessly goes through infinite cycles of birth and death due to the influence of Prakriti. In our own lives, we know so many people that are hale and hearty one moment, and are killed by an accident in the next moment. They have no say in the matter whatsoever. The only way one can get out of Prakriti's influence is to put forth effort towards achieving liberation.

Now, we know that Ishvara commands Prakriti to perform creation, sustenance and dissolution. In the chapter on karma yoga, we have

seen that actions have a tendency to bind us, to make us get attached to them. Does Ishvara get attached to the actions of creation, sustenance and dissolution? We shall see in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 9, Chapter 9

*na cha maam taani karmaani nibandhanti dhananjaya |
udaaseenavadaaseenamasaktam teshu karmasu || 9 ||*

Nor do those actions bind me, O Dhananjaya. I remain as though indifferent and unattached to those actions.

na : not
cha : and
maam : my
taani : those
karmaani : actions
nibandhanti : bind
dhananjaya : O Dhananjaya
udaaseenavat : as though indifferent
aaseenam : sit
asaktam : unattached
teshu : those
karmasu : in actions

Earlier in the chapter, Shri Krishna addressed several misconceptions that we have about Ishvara. He asserted that Ishvara cannot be contained in any one part of the universe, in any one object. He also asserted that we need to wait for a long time to Ishvara. Ishvara is accessible at this very moment. What is missing is knowledge that enables us to recognize Ishvara in everything.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna addresses another misconception of Ishvara, that he has a personal agenda in each and everyone's destiny. To that end, Shri Krishna clarifies that Ishvara delegates the functioning of the universe to the laws of Prakriti. He does not personally get involved, nor does he claim credit for the creation, destruction and sustenance of billions of beings in this universe.

Our Puranaas contains several stories about the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva who are charged with the responsibilities of creation, sustenance and dissolution respectively. They are aided by their consorts. Saraswati provides the knowledge needed for creation. Lakshmi provides the wealth needed for sustenance. Parvati provides the power needed for dissolution. The stories may portray that these deities personally take effort to perform their duties, but at the universal level, they are all part of the fully automatic system of Prakriti.

Therefore, the lessons for us here is that we should follow karma yoga because it is a universal law. Like Ishvara, who runs the universe while knowing that it is Prakriti's handiwork, we too should perform our duties in a spirit of vairagya or detachment, knowing that Prakriti is running everything. If we worry about who will get the credit for our actions, then we will get bound, taking us further away for liberation.

So then, how should we use this knowledge to refine our vision towards the world? This is explained next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 9

*mayaadhyakshena prakritihi sooyate sacharaacharam |
hetunaanena kaunteya jagadviparivartate || 10 ||*

mayaa : my
adhyakshena : supervision
prakritihi : Prakriti
sooyate : generates
sacharaacharam : moving and motion-
less universe
hetu : purpose
anena : in this manner
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
jagat : universe
viparivartate : revolves

Under my supervision, Prakriti generates this universe of moving and motionless (beings). With that purpose, O Kaunteya, the universe revolves.

Shri Krishna concludes the topic of Prakriti and its mechanisms by re-asserting that Prakriti is subservient to Ishvara. He describes Ishvara as the supervisor, the "adhyaksha". He says that Ishvara does not physically have to "do" anything in order to create, sustain and dissolve the universe. Ishvara's mere presence enables Prakriti to function, just like electricity enables a television to function. Without his presence, Prakriti remains inert and is incapable of doing anything whatsoever.

From Ishvara's standpoint, there is no notion of "doing work" or "obtaining the result"; he knows that ultimately it is Prakriti that runs the show, and therefore he remains detached. He is like the owner of a theatre that has employed a magician to perform a show. The owner is unconcerned whether the magician cuts a woman in half with a saw, or pulls a rabbit out of a hat.

Let us now look at the practical implication this shloka. If we substitute the word Ishvara in the previous statement with the word "jeeva" or individual, we come to the same conclusion from the previous chapters on karma yoga. Only through disassociation with the notion that "I am the doer" and "I obtain the result" can we truly be liberated from the cycle of creation and dissolution.

The key question is : who controls whom? If we let Prakriti control us, if we let our lower nature drag us towards sense pleasure, we can never be liberated. We should re-assert our control of our lower self through our higher self.

Furthermore, Shri Krishna also gives us a technique to deal with life's ups and downs with this shloka. Whenever we encounter a sorrowful or hurtful situation, all we need to do is to know that (a) we have obtained this situation through our own actions and (b) it is yet another name and form that Prakriti has created.

Once we know that something is a name and form, we will immediately know that it is Prakriti's handiwork, just like we know that something is an April fool's joke or a magician's trick. This will enable us to pierce through Prakriti's pranks and to know that Ishvara the supervisor is behind everything.

So then, Shri Krishna has explained to us "how the universe revolves", in other words, how the magic trick works. This is how we should develop our vision of the world. However, instead of trying to see Ishvara behind everything, many people still try to box Ishvara into a finite concept. More on this is taken up in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 9

*avajaananti maam moodhaa maanusheem tanumaashritam |
param bhaavamajaananto mama bhootamaheshwaram || 11 ||*

Resorting to a human form, foolish people insult me, not knowing my supreme nature as the overlord of all beings.

avajaanantaha : insult
maam : me
moodhaahaa : foolish people
maanusheem : human
tanum : form
aashritam : resorting to
param : supreme
bhaavam : nature
ajaanantaha : not knowing
mama : my
bhootamaheshwaram : overlord of all beings

Removal of all misconceptions of Ishvara is one of the recurring themes of this chapter. Even though Shri Krishna has repeatedly defined Ishvara as infinite, many people still get stuck with one form of Ishvara or the other. In this shloka, Shri Krishna terms such people foolish, and their behaviour insulting.

Now, many of us were conditioned by our cultures to believe that Ishvara is something that is far away, and will take years and years of devotion to achieve. But Shri Krishna, through the Gita, has revealed to us the true nature of Ishvara as infinite, all-pervading and available right here and now. To ensure that we do not revert back to our old ways of thinking, Shri Krishna uses a strong term to refer to such people: foolish.

Even before we go to the level of Ishvara, we commit the error of thinking that our eternal essence, our self, is our human body only. Removing this erroneous notion was the message of the second chapter. In the same way, we are likely to think of Ishvara as a finite form, and in doing so, treat everything else in the world with disregard.

Shri Krishna says that such an attitude is personally insulting to Ishvara, who is the supreme controller of the universe. It is like introducing a Nobel peace prize winner as an ordinary citizen, or to think that a junior police officer is the be-all and end-all of a country's government. People with such erroneous notions can cause a great deal of harm to themselves, as is pointed out in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 9

*moghaashaa moghakarmaano moghajnyaanaa vichetasaha |
raakshaseemaasureem chaiva prakritim mohineem shritaahaa || 12 ||*

moghaashaa : useless desires
moghakarmaana : useless actions
moghajnyaanaa : useless knowledge
vichetasaha : unintelligent
raakshaseem : devilish
aasureem : evil
cha : and
eva : also
prakritim : nature
mohineem : delusory
shritaahaa : take refuge in

With useless desires, useless actions and useless knowledge, the unintelligent take refuge in delusory, devilish and evil nature.

After following this chapter so far, we may wonder why has Shri Krishna spent so much time in addressing our erroneous notion of Ishvara? He has done so because erroneous knowledge is the start of a chain of consequences that can either uplift or ruin our life, not just from a spiritual but also material perspective. He illustrates that chain in this shloka.

Consider a child born into a family that gives utmost important to the acquisition of money, but does not emphasize the ethical means of doing so. Such an erroneous knowledge starts a chain of consequences. The child always desires money, and all his actions are directed towards the pursuit of money.

Shri Krishna calls these useless desires and useless actions. All of these eventually lead to increasingly worse character traits in the child. He can undertake delusory actions (gambling), evil actions (stealing) or worse yet, devilish actions (murder), all because of the wrong notion that acquisition of money is paramount.

Broadly, if we start with the erroneous notion that our body and mind is everything and that Ishvara is a distant finite entity, all our desires and actions will be directed towards ensuring that our body can live comfortably. We will continue to make external adjustments such as moving to a new city or changing jobs in search of comfort and security, to continually appease our body and mind, and to gain freedom from sorrow. Since we have not acquired the knowledge of our true nature and Ishvara's true natures, we will never understand that Ishvara is our ultimate source of security and the ultimate freedom from sorrow.

So we have seen that erroneous knowledge about Ishvara can lead to ultimate ruin. Who then, are those people that, having had the correct knowledge, develop the right type of relationship with Ishvara? This is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 9

*mahaatmaanastu maam paartha daiveem prakritimaashritaahaa |
bhajantyananyamanaso jnyaatvaa bhootaadimavyayam || 13 ||*

But, noble individuals take refuge in my divine nature, O Paartha. Knowing me as the imperishable source of all beings, they worship me single-mindedly.

mahaatmaanahah : noble individuals
tu : but
maam : my
paartha : O Paartha
daiveem : divine
prakritim : nature
aashritaahaa : take refuge
bhajanti : worship
ananyamanasaha : single-minded
jnyaatvaa : having known
bhootaadim : source of all beings
avyayam : imperishable

Shri Krishna now begins to describe those individuals who have understood the true, divine nature of Ishvara. These "mahaatmaas" or noble individuals treat Ishvara as their one and only one refuge, and worship him with unwavering devotion. With a view to instruct us in the ways of such noble individuals, Shri Krishna devotes the next few shlokas to this topic.

The word "aashritaha" or refuge is key to understanding this shloka. What does this word mean? It is how we answer the question "when I am in trouble, what do I turn to?". Most of us have various sources of refuge. For some, it is their ancestral inheritance. For some, it is their academic qualifications. For some, it is their family. Whenever we are in trouble, we pursue those avenues for comfort and security.

However, the mahaatmaas or noble individuals do not look to any of these sources for refuge. They have understood one simple fact: anything that can change over time is under the control of Prakriti. Prakriti, the realm of name and form, is every changing and can never be relied upon for support all the time. We ourselves would have encountered several instances where money or family did not help someone in their time of need. The noble individuals know that there is only one true refuge that is universal and unchanging: it is Ishvara.

Knowing this, what do the noble individuals do? They are "ananya manasaha", they are singularly devoted to Ishvara. Even though they may be tempted by Prakriti's play and dazzle of name and form, they know that ultimately every source of joy that it gives, turns into sorrow eventually. Furthermore, their devotion for Ishvara is not for the attainment for anything else. It is solely for the attainment of Ishvara.

Unlike these noble individuals, most of us still rush into Prakriti for joy, comfort, security and support. But Prakriti teaches us a lesson over our lifetime when we repeatedly seek joy which turns into sor-

row. How do the noble individuals remain focused in Ishvara while living in the world of Prakriti? We shall see next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 9

*satatam keertayanto maam yatantashcha dridhavrataahaa |
namasyantashcha maam bhaktyaa nityayuktaa upaasate || 14 ||*

Always glorifying me with resolute effort, and venerating me devotedly, they are constantly engaged in my worship.

satatam : always
keertayantaha : glorifying
maam : me
yatantashcha : effort
dridhavrataahaa : resolute
namasyantaha : venerating me
cha : and
maam : me
bhaktyaa : devoted
nityayuktaahaa : constantly engaged
upaasate : worship

Shri Krishna begins to enumerate the qualities of those noble individuals that have gained knowledge of Ishvara's infinite nature. We should try to bring as many qualities as we can into our lives, and not think that they are only for some select extraordinary people.

Firstly, Shri Krishna says that these noble individuals perform "keertan" and "bhajan". Typically, we tend to think of keertan as singing songs in front of a deity. But here, the meaning is deeper. Keertan here means the three step process of hearing scriptures (shravanam), resolving doubts (mananam) and internalizing the knowledge (nidhidhyaasanam). It is only through this process that the true nature of Ishvara is understood.

It is also imperative to perform keertan as frequently as possible. As we have seen so far, Prakriti needs no help in order to ensnare us daily with the temptation of name and form. Also, Prakriti is not just responsible for visible objects but also thoughts, feelings, emotions and memories that can lead to straying away from Ishvara. Repeated keertan is the only way to guard against such distractions.

Shri Krishna also emphasizes the power of "vrata" or resolution. Most spiritual traditions encourage practices like fasting or abstaining from pleasures during certain days. Observance of such vows strengthens our will power so that we can use that inner strength towards fending off Prakriti. Knowledge of Ishvara, without the will power to remain established in that knowledge, will not work. If someone cannot even remain without food for a day, it will be difficult for them to deal with the might of Prakriti.

Another aspect of the noble individuals is that they do "namaskaara" to Ishvara, which means that they offer themselves to Ishvara. When things are going well, it is easy to accept the will of Ishvara. However, many individuals begin to lose faith in Ishvara when they go through a rough period in their lives. True veneration happens when we real-

ize that even the rough period in our life happens for a reason that we will understand in the course of time.

Broadly speaking, Shri Krishna wants the devotee to dedicate not just his intellect but also his mind. Unless we engage with anything at an emotional level, our pursuit will always be dry, academic and partial. It will be like a PhD student who forgets what he learned right after he receives his degree.

So therefore, Shri Krishna says that individuals with these qualities are the true devotees. They have understood the true method of "up-
anasanaa", of worshipping Ishvara. That is why they remain "nitya
yukta" or always united and connected with Ishvara, and also, Ishvara
remains ever united with them.

Next, Shri Krishna enumerates the different ways in which these noble individuals worship Ishvara.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 9

*jnyaanayagnena chaapyanye yajanto maamupaasate |
ekatvena prithakvena bahudhaa vishvatomukham || 15 ||*

Others, offering the sacrifice of knowledge, worship me with oneness, separateness and also multifaceted diversity.

jnyaanayagnena : sacrifice of knowledge
cha : and
api : also
anye : others
yajantaha : offer
maam : me
upaasate : worship
ekatvena : oneness
prithakvena : separateness
bahudhaa : diversity
vishvatomukham : multifaceted

Shri Krishna radically defines our notion of Ishvara worship in this shloka. He says that recalling and remembering the infinite nature of Ishvara throughout our lives is a form of worship called jnyaana yaganya or the sacrifice of knowledge. Unlike most forms of worship, we can perform it without any effort anytime, anywhere. All we have to do is to learn to see Ishvara in everything.

There are several spiritual traditions that have somewhat differing notions of Ishvara's nature. The tradition of Adi Shankaracharya, which this book tries to follow closely, views the jeeva and Ishvara as one. Acharya Ramanuja's tradition views jeeva as a part of Ishvara. Acharya Madhva's tradition views the jeeva and Ishvara as separate entities. Shri Krishna enumerates all of these viewpoints in this shloka, then reconciles all three by saying that all are equally valid as sacrifices of knowledge.

Regardless of the tradition followed, Shri Krishna urges us to continuously perform the sacrifice of knowledge so that we weaken our individuality while strengthening our faith in Ishvara. When we see more Ishvara in everything and everyone, our likes and dislikes start thinning down as well. We also begin to realize that all our joys and sorrows are tied to our actions, and so we begin to treat everything as a "prasaada" or Ishvara's gift.

Shri Krishna now begins to give us pointers on where and how to see Ishvara.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 9

*aham kraturaham yajnyaha svadhaamahamaushadham |
mantrohamahamevaajyamamagniraham hutam || 16 ||*

aham : I am
kratuhu : vedic ritual
yajnyaha : sacrifice
svadhaa : oblation
aushadham : herb
mantraha : chant
aajyam : butter
agnihi : fire
hutam : act of offering

I am the vedic ritual, I am the sacrifice, I am the oblation, I am the herb, I am the chant, I am the butter, I am the fire and I am the act of offering.

Shri Krishna begins to enumerate several opportunities to see Ishvara in our life. It is not enough to consider Ishvara as a finite resident in a picture or an idol. We should be able to incorporate Ishvara in all aspects of our lives. In this shloka, Shri Krishna emphasizes work as a connection to Ishvara by saying that Ishvara is present within all aspects of action.

During the time of the Mahabharata war, Vedic rituals were a part and parcel of life and were well understood by all. To that end, Shri Krishna asks Arjuna to view Ishvara in each and every aspect of the vedic ritual. Since such rituals comprise herbs, butter, chanting, fire, and offering of oblations, Shri Krishna says that Ishvara is present in all of them. Arjuna would have had no trouble in ensuring that Ishvara was ever present in such a ritual after he heard this shloka.

We, however, lack exposure to such rituals, and therefore we adapt this shloka towards any action that we perform daily. For example, if we are cooking a meal for our family, we can see Ishvara in the cooking flame, in the spices, in the vegetables, in the oil, in the knife and so on. Or if we spend a lot of time creating documents on the computer, then we can try to see Ishvara in the laptop, the mouse, the word document, the browser and so on.

Shri Krishna, by redefining action as worship of Ishvara, does not demarcate when and who can worship Ishvara. Sant Kabirdas was a cobbler and Arjuna was a warrior. But both of them could access Ishvara without leaving their respective professions. We have the opportunity to do the very same thing. It is our attitude while performing our work which is most important.

Further means to access Ishvara are provided next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 9

*pitaahamasya jagato maataa dhaataa pitaamaha |
vedyam pavitramomkaara riksaam yajureva cha || 17 ||*

I am the father, mother, support and grandfather of this universe. I am the knowable, the purifier, the syllable Om, and the Rig, Saama and Yajur also.

pitaa : father
aham : I am
asya : this
jagataha : universe
maataa : mother
dhaataa : support
pitaamaha : grandfather
vedyam : knowable
pavitram : purifier
omkaara : Om syllable
rik : Rig
saam : Saama
yajur : Yajur
eva : also
cha : and

Shri Krishna further elaborates on Ishvara's infinite all-pervading nature by asserting that he is the father, mother and grandfather of this universe. A father's nature is to protect the child and to push it to grow. A mother embodies the quality of nurture and impartiality, she will care for even the most misbehaved child. A grandfather is extremely attached to his grandchild and takes great pleasure in demonstrating affection towards the child, whereas the father may sometimes not show affection openly. Shri Krishna says that Ishvara treats every being in the universe like a caring family would.

Symbolically, Ishvara as father represents the intelligence behind the creation of the universe. Ishvara as mother represents the substance that creates the universe. Ishvara as grandfather refers to the source of intelligence and substance. It is said that Lord Shiva, when asked for his great grandfather's name, replied "Shiva". There is no further cause of this universe other than Ishvara.

Another pointer to Ishvara is "dhaata" or sustainer. As we have seen earlier, it is Ishvara in his infinite nature that holds the universe together in a state of harmony, where everything is in its place. Ishvara is also the three Vedas which are ultimate source of knowledge in the universe, the only knowledge that needs to be known. Their essence is captured in the syllable "Om", which is considered the utmost purifier. In other words, once we see Ishvara in everything, everything becomes pure.

The next shloka contains a series of pointers to Ishvara which are considered the foundation of bhakti or devotion.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 9

*gatirbhartaa prabhuh saakshi nivaasaha sharanam suhrita |
prabhavah pralayah sthaanam nidhaanam beejamavyayam || 18 ||*

I am the outcome, nourisher, master, witness, abode, refuge and well-wisher. I am the origin, dissolution, sustenance, repository and the imperishable seed.

gatihi : outcome
bhartaa : nourisher
prabhuh : master
saakshi : witness
nivaasaha : abode
sharanam : refuge
suhrita : well-wisher
prabhavah : origin
pralayah : dissolution
sthaanam : sustenance
nidhaanam : repository
beejam : seed
avyayam : imperishable

Shri Krishna gives 12 single-word pointers or indicators of Ishvara. These are considered the foundation of many bhakti traditions. A more exhaustive list is provided in the Vishnu Sahasranaama, the thousand names of Ishvara as Lord Vishnu.

"Gatihi" means goal, destination or outcome. The karmaphaa, the fruit of our action, leads us to our destination or goal. The actions are the means, and the fruit of the actions is the goal. Shri Krishna says that Ishvara is the highest goal that we can aspire to. "Bhartaa" is the controller and supporter of the entire universe. It literally means someone who provides for his family. Ishvara nourishes and takes care of all beings in this universe, hence he is the provider of the universe. Since he is also the ultimate controller and master, he is known as "Prabhuhu".

When we are kids, we aspire to become like our parents. They provide for us and also control our activities. They are our gatihi, bhartaa and prabhuhu. But if they get too attached to us, they will continue planning our life even when we become adults. That is why Ishvara remains an unattached witness, or "saakshi".

Furthermore, Ishvara is the "nivaasaha" or container of the universe. He is "sharanam", the ultimate refuge when there is no one else left for us to turn to. He is a well wisher or "suhrita", someone who does not expect anything in return. Ishvara creates, dissolves and maintains the universe therefore he is "prabhavaha", "pralaya" and "sthaanam". He is also "nidhaanam", the repository where all beings become unmanifest at the end of creation.

Finally, Ishvara is the seed that has created the universe. Unlike most seeds that can only generate one plant, Ishvara continues to create the universe infinitely, without modification. Hence he is called the imperishable seed "avyayam beejam".

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 9

*tapaamyaham aham varsham nigruhnaamyutsrijaami cha |
amritam chaiva mrityushcha sadasachchaahamarjuna || 19 ||*

I provide heat, I hold back and send forth the rain. I am immortality and also death, I am real and also unreal, O Arjuna.

tapaami : provide heat
aham : I
varsham : rain
nigruhnaami : hold back
utsrijaami : send forth
cha : and
amritam : immortality
cha : and
eva : also
mrityuhi : death
sat : real
asat : unreal
aham : I am
arjuna : O Arjuna

A recurring theme of this chapter is that we should see Ishvara everywhere, instead of looking only in things and places that our senses find pleasurable. In that regard, since we deal with the weather everyday, it can become a great pointer to access Ishvara. However, anytime the climate becomes too hot, or there is excessive rain or drought, our body feels uncomfortable, and therefore we do not even think of Ishvara when those things happen.

Shri Krishna says in the shloka that it is Ishvara that is providing the heat as the sun. So when it gets extremely hot, we should recognize that it is Ishvara that is providing the energy for the sun. And even though we may feel uncomfortable, we should realize that Ishvara has the welfare of the entire earth in mind. When it gets hot, the water on earth rises to form clouds, and is eventually sent back as rain. If the sun were never to give enough heat, we would never get any rain on earth.

Shri Krishna also says that Ishvara is found in immortality as well as in death. Symbolically, what is meant here is that knowing Ishvara as an infinite entity is real immortality, and knowing Ishvara as finite is death. When we see only waves and foam in the ocean, we will eventually see them "die". But when we only see the ocean, there is no death whatsoever.

How do we develop such a vision? By knowing what is "sat" or real and what is "asat" or not real. Just because something is perceived by our senses, it does not automatically become real. Optical illusions are a great example. This echoes the lessons of the second chapter where Shri Krishna encourages us to develop "tattva drishti" or the vision of the essence, not of names and forms.

With this shloka, Shri Krishna concludes the topic on pointers of Ishvara. A new topic, forms of devotion, is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 9

*traividyaa maam somapaahaa pootapaa yajnairishtvaa svargatim prarthayante
|
te punyamaasaadya surendralokamashnanti divyaandivi devabhoogaan || 20
||*

Those well-versed in the three Vedas, after worshipping me through sacrifices, and drinking nectar and purified of sin, they pray for attainment of heaven. Having obtained merits, they enjoy the divine pleasures of the gods in heaven.

Having described the infinite nature of Ishvara, Shri Krishna now elaborates upon the topic of devotees or bhaktas. There are predominantly two types of devotees: desire-oriented (sakaama) and desireless (nishkaam). Desire-oriented devotees are described in these two shlokas. Note the change to a longer meter to emphasize a change in the topic.

Who is the desire-oriented bhakta? He is a devotee who worships Ishvara for a material gain. He either wants merits (punya), wealth (artha), earthly joy (sukha), heavenly joy (svaraga) or a combination of these four. In simple words he is looking for money, name and fame.

So for example, if someone wants to buy a car, they pray that it is the right price and that it is in stock. If someone has an exam, they pray that they pass in the exam. Vedas and rituals mentioned in this shloka refer to the efforts that we put into appeasing Ishvara. We may not perform elaborate rituals, but there always is a thought that "please God let this happen so that I can be happy", which amounts to the same thing as the rituals mentioned here.

Now, when a child asks his parents for something insignificant, a parent feels frustrated because the parent has the capability to give much greater value, but cannot do so because the child insists on that insignificant thing. Similarly, Ishvara also may feel sometimes that the things we ask of him - wealth, heavenly pleasures and so on - are insignificant. Such people do not have a strong resolve towards liberation, they do not have the "vyavasaatmikaa buddhi" mentioned in chapter 2. Their focus is diverted away from Ishvara towards material pursuits.

traividyaa : those well versed in three Vedas
maam : me
somapaahaa : drinkers of nectar
pootapaahaa : purified of sin
yajnaihi : through sacrifices
ishtvaa : after worship
svargatim : to attain heaven
prarthayante : pray
te : they
punyam : merits
aasaadya : obtain
surendralokam : abode of Indra
ashnanti : enjoy
divyaan : divine
divi : heavenly world
devabhoogaan : pleasures of the gods

Assuming they somehow accumulate merits and attain heaven, what happens next?

Bhagavad Gita Verse 21, Chapter 9

*te tam bhuktvaa svargalokam vishaalam ksheene punye martyalokam vishanti
|
evam trayeedharmamanuprapannaa gataagaam kaamakaamaa labhante || 21
||*

te : they
tam : that
bhuktvaa : enjoyed
svargalokam : heaven
vishaalam : mighty
ksheene : exhausted
pune : merits
martyalokam : mortal world
vishanti : come to
evam : in this manner
trayeedharmam : three-fold system
anuprapannaahaa : take refuge
gataagaam : arrival and departure
kaamakaamaahaa : those with selfish
desires
labhante : attain

Having enjoyed the (joys of) mighty heaven, they, with their merits exhausted, return to the mortal world. In this manner, those with selfish desires, who take refuge in the three-fold system, arrive and depart (repeatedly).

Shri Krishna continues the description of desire-oriented devotees (sakaam bhaktas) who worship Ishvara with a view to gain earthly and heavenly rewards and comforts. Shri Krishna says that their efforts will bear fruit on earth as well as in heaven. However, he says that their stay in heaven is temporary. After their stay ends, they once again come back to earth and get caught up in the endless cycle of birth and death.

As an example, consider the plight of those people who work hard, earn a good living but have trouble managing their spending. As soon as they get their salary, they instantly spend most of it on the first of the month, and barely manage to pay their bills for the remainder of the month. They somehow forget that fact that money, like anything else in this world, is finite.

Similarly, people who enjoy heavenly pleasures stay in heaven until their merits (punya) are depleted. Once that happens, they come back to earth and are born into a human form if they are lucky, or some other form if they are not.

Shri Krishna says that such people follow the "three-fold system". This refers to Vedic knowledge comprising the three modes or gunaas. Since the gunaas themselves are finite and transient, the results attained by the followers of these gunaas will also be finite and transient.

So therefore, although the desire-oriented devotee is better than someone who has no room for devotion, he is still trapped in a pursuit of comfort in pleasure in this world as well as in other worlds. Unlike such a devotee, what we should truly desire is liberation or moksha.

What kind of devotee gets liberation? This is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 22, Chapter 9

*ananyaashchintayanto maam ye janaahaa paryupaasate |
teshaam nityaabhiyuktaanaam yogakshemam vahaamyaham || 22 ||*

With single-pointed meditation, those who are constantly engaged in my worship, I carry the burden of acquisition and preservation of their needs.

ananyaaha : single-pointed
chintayantaha : meditation
maam : me
ye : those who
janaahaa : people
paryupaasate : worship
teshaam : their
nityaabhiyuktaanaam : constantly engaged
yogakshemam : acquisition and preservation of needs
vahaami : carry the burden
aham : I

Many commentators compare this shloka to a shining gem located right in the middle of the Gita. This oft-quoted shloka contains Ishvara's promise to all devotees. Here, Shri Krishna assures us that Ishvara will personally attend to the needs of his devotees. But he also defines the type of devotee that is being discussed here. It is one who is ever absorbed in the contemplation of Ishvara. For such people, there is no fear, suffering, sorrow or lack of anything.

Previously, we learned about the "sakaama bhakta" or desire oriented devotee. This shloka describes the "nishkaama bhakta" or desireless devotee. Who is a nishkaama bhakta? It is the one who is only seeking one thing: moksha, liberation. His desire for moksha is equal to no other desire, for that desire will permanently eliminate all other desires. it is a desire for infinitude or poornatva. He has "ananya" or focused goal, other devotees have "anya" or diverse goals.

So if we are desireless devotees, if our only desire is liberation which is the attainment of Ishvara, what does Ishvara do for us? Shri Krishna says that Ishvara takes care of "yoga" and "kshema". Our entire life comprises two major activities: acquisition and preservation. The early part of our life goes in acquisition of knowledge, wealth, family, position and title. This is denoted by the word "yoga". The later part of our life is devoted to preservation of what we have acquired. This is "kshema".

Many commentators cite a wonderful story to illustrate this shloka. There was a brahmin who had great faith in this shloka, but lost it one day because his family did not get enough alms to have a proper meal one day. In disgust, he tore the palm leaf on which this shloka was written and went out of the house. Later, a boy came to his house with a sack of rations. He informed the brahmin's wife that her husband had sent her the food.

The brahmin's wife noticed that the boy's tongue was bleeding. She found out from the boy that it was her husband who had cut off the boy's tongue. When the brahmin came back, the wife rebuked him for injuring the boy who had delivered the rations. The brahmin, it turns out, knew nothing about the boy or the rations. He quickly realized that it was Ishvara who delivered the food, and that when he tore the palm leaf, it injured Ishvara in the form of that boy. So Ishvara did not just deliver the food, he also carried the rations on his back. This is what is meant by the word "vahaami" which means "to carry".

What is the practical implication of this shloka? If we wholly devote ourselves to the pursuit of Ishvara, we need not spend any time incessantly worrying about our needs. As long as we perform our duties efficiently and in a spirit of service to Ishvara, we will be well taken care of. Ishvara will not just carry our burden of needs, he will also carry all of our worries as well.

The culmination of this shloka's vision is the knowledge that there is no such thing as "my" need or "your" need. If everything is Ishvara and everything is in Ishvara, then he will take care of his own needs, just like our fingers are not worrying about someone taking care of their individual needs.

What happens to those who do not worship Ishvara in his infinite nature? This is explained in the upcoming shlokas.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 23, Chapter 9

*yepyanyadevataa bhaktaa yajante shraddhyaanvitaahaa |
tepi maameva kaunteya yajantyavidhipoorvakam || 23 ||*

ye : those
api : even
anyadevataahaa : other deities
bhaktaahaa : devotees
yajante : worship
shraddhya : faith
anvitaahaa : filled with
te : they
api : also
maam : me
eva : only
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
yajanti : worship
avidhipoorvakam : incorrectly

Even those devotees who worship other deities, filled with faith, they also worship me only, O Kaunteya, (but) incorrectly.

The recurring theme of this chapter is the removing misconceptions about the worship of Ishvara. Shri Krishna again invokes that theme in this shloka. He says that those devotees who worship deities other than the infinite Ishvara ultimately worship him, but do so in a wrong manner.

Many of us have been brought up in a tradition in which we worship a specific deity. As children, we are taught to invoke that deity during auspicious occasions, during periods of prosperity as well as periods of difficulty. We should be grateful to our parents for inculcating these good sanskaaraas or habits in us at an early age. However, Shri Krishna says that as we grow older, it is important to have the correct knowledge of what we are worshipping, because in most cases, our knowledge is limited and incorrect.

What is this incorrect knowledge? Thinking that what we are worshipping is a finite deity in a certain form is incorrect knowledge. When we see a small government office, we do not make the mistake of thinking that a small office contains the government of an entire nation. Or when we look at a wave, we never imagine that the entire ocean is just that small wave.

Similarly, even though we worship a finite deity in our home or in a temple, we should never think that we are worshipping just that finite deity. If we think in that way, our worship will be incorrect, it will have a flaw.

So then, what is the right knowledge? It is knowing that we are worshipping Ishvara in his infinite nature. Just like we contact the entire Internet when we surf the web on our phone, we contact the infinite Ishvara when we worship a finite deity. Ishvara is the foundation of everything, therefore ultimately all prayers reach Ishvara.

Why do most devotees commit this error? This is explained next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 24, Chapter 9

*aham hi sarvayajnyaanaam bhoktaa cha prabhureva cha |
na tu maamabhijaananti tattvena atashchyavanti te || 24 ||*

For I am the recipient and also the lord of all sacrificial rituals, but they do not know me in essence. That is why they fall.

aham : I
hi : for
sarvayajnyaanaam : all sacrificial rituals
bhoktaa : recipient
cha : and
prabhuhu : lord
eva : also
cha : and
na : not
tu : but
maam : me
abhijaananti : know
tattvena : in essence
ataha : that is why
chyavanti : fall
te : they

Earlier, Shri Krishna asserted that most people worship finite deities with the expectation of finite rewards, but ultimately, all their prayers reach the infinite Ishvara. This type of worship in itself is ok, but the result obtained through this worship can only be finite. Shri Krishna says that the reason most devotees commit this error because they do not recognize Ishvara in essence, they do not comprehend the real nature of Ishvara.

Imagine that people from a remote village visit a city. They may mistake a minister's office for the nation's government. They may mistake a computer for the Internet. They may mistake a power outlet for the electric grid. Just like such people will commit grave errors unless they understand the presence of the larger in the small, we also will commit errors in our worship unless we understand the real infinite nature of Ishvara.

So therefore, when we act in this world, we should always bear in mind that the recipient of any action is Ishvara. When we feed someone, care for someone, help someone in need, we should know that ultimately we are feeding, caring for and helping Ishvara. This will reduce our sense of ego or I-ness.

Furthermore, emotions such as pride, greed and jealousy are caused because we think we own something, or we covet something that others own. If we know that the ultimate owner of everything is Ishvara, it reduces our sense of attachment and "mine-ness". Ego and attachment are great obstacles in the path of liberation, and this knowledge cuts them down.

What is the fate of such faulty worship? This is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 25, Chapter 9

*yaanti devavrataa devaan pitrunyaanti pitruvrataahaa |
bhootaani yaanti bhootejyaa yaanti madyaajinopi maam || 25 ||*

Those who worship deities attain the deities, those who worship ancestors go to the ancestors, those who worship spirits attain the spirits, but those who worship me attain me.

yaanti : attain
devavrataa : deity worshippers
devaan : deities
pitrun : ancestors
pitruvrataahaa : ancestor worshippers
bhootaani : spirits
bhootejyaahaa : spirit worshippers
mat : my
yaajinaha : worshippers
api : but
maam : me

As we are exploring the topic of worship, we should not make the mistake of thinking that worship only happens in a temple in front of a deity. In many cases, worship of individuals is something that we take for granted. If we need a loan, we have to worship the loan officer to gain his favour. If we need a job, we have to worship someone in that firm so that they can do a referral. If we need admission into a school, we have to worship the admissions officer.

The eighteenth chapter of the Gita categorizes every action into three types: saatvic, raajasic and taamasic. Worship of a guru for knowledge is saatvic worship. Worship of a loan officer for a loan is raajasic worship. Worship of a gangster to kill someone is taamasic worship. But ultimately, any knowledge that comes under the realm of the three gunaas is finite.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna gives examples of worship towards deities, ancestors and spirits that encompass most kinds of so-called spiritual worship performed today. However, as we saw earlier, the best that this kind worship can give us is a finite material result. Even if we get to go to heaven through such worship, we will have to come back to earth one day when our merits are exhausted.

The infinite Ishvara has ability to give us liberation. Instead of asking that, we ask finite things like exam success, job success and so on. It is like asking a millionaire for pennies. We do so because we have conditioned ourselves to accept very narrow materialistic definitions of success. If our definition of success is narrow, our definition of Ishvara somehow becomes narrow as well.

So therefore, we come to the conclusion that we have to learn the correct technique of worshipping Ishvara. How does that work? Is it something arcane and complex? Shri Krishna provides a beautiful answer to that question next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 26, Chapter 9

*patram pushpam phalam toyam yo me bhaktyaa prayacchati |
tadaham bhaktyupahritamashnaami prayataatmanaha || 26 ||*

patram : leaf
pushpam : flower
phalam : fruit
toyam : water
yaha : one who
me : to me
bhaktyaa : with devotion
prayacchati : presents
tat : that
aham : me
bhaktyupahritam : loving gift
ashnaami : I will consume
prayataatmanaha : pure hearted being

One who presents a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water with devotion to me, I will consume that loving gift from that pure hearted being.

Having described the incorrect method of worship earlier, Shri Krishna now explains the correct method in yet another gem of a shloka in this chapter. He says that Ishvara does not want any expensive gifts. To become his devotee, we can give him something that nature offers in plenty for free: a leaf, a flower, a fruit or even some water.

Why is it important to give a gift to Ishvara? Building strong relationships requires actions and attitude. Take the example of a newly married husband and wife. How do they ensure that they maintain a strong bond? To start with, they can exchange gifts during events such as Valentine's day, their wedding anniversary with cards, flowers and so on.

But material exchanges in themselves are not sufficient. There has to be quality time spent with each other. Also, there has to be an exchange of meaningful thoughts, meaningful dialogue, not just talk about movies and sports etc.

The same thing also applies to worship. When we do all kinds of rituals for ourselves such as taking a bath, applying fragrance, eating food and so on, we can at least begin worshipping Ishvara by offering a flower or some water daily. Unless our mind and our actions are both engaged in Ishvara's worship, it will be difficult to build a strong bond with him.

Now, why is all this needed? One could say that we should just practice karma yoga by doing actions selflessly. But, karma yoga is incomplete without surrender to a higher ideal, and Ishvara is the highest possible ideal. Moreover, without the right emotional link to Ishvara, our pursuit will become dry and academic.

So therefore, when we offer a simple gift to Ishvara, but with an attitude of devotion, Ishvara happily consumes the gift. Our attitude should be similar to a small child presenting a gift to his father or

mother, because in reality, we are offering to Ishvara what was his to begin with.

Once we have created this habit of worshipping Ishvara daily in our house, we should slowly bring it out of the house and into every action, as described in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 27, Chapter 9

*yatkaroshi yadashnaasi yajjuhoshi dadaasi yata |
yattapasyasi kaunteya tatkurushva madarpanam || 27 ||*

yat : whatever
karoshi : you do
ashnaasi : you eat
juhoshi : you offer in a sacrifice
dadaasi : you donate
tapasyasi : you practice as penance
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
tat : that
kurushva : do
madarpanam : offer it to me

Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer in a sacrifice, whatever you donate, whatever you practice as penance, O Kaunteya, offer it to me.

Shri Krishna explains the technique of bringing worship into daily life. Previously we learnt the technique of worshipping Ishvara using simple offerings like water. Once we get used to the worship of Ishvara in the home and in the temple, we need to bring that spirit of worship into all of our actions. In other words, we need to learn how to bring divinity into our actions. To that end, this shloka urges us to perform all actions as an act of worship towards Ishvara.

The simplest and most common action we perform is that of eating. Shri Krishna says that even the act of eating should be considered an act of worship. Traditionally, before every meal, the first five morsels are offered to the deity within with the words "praanaaya svaaha". The rest of the meal should be consumed with the attitude that the act of eating is occurring in the service of Ishvara, and not for the appeasement of our senses.

Now, take another action like exercising, for instance. How do we transform that into an act of worship? Anything that causes discomfort in the short term, but gets us gains in the long term, is an act of "tapas" or penance. Shri Krishna says that we can convert any action into a penance if we imbibe it with the attitude of worship. So if we have to take a long walk for exercising, for example, we can imagine that we are doing a "pradakshina", that we walking around a temple. In this manner, even a discomforting act becomes divine.

Similarly, any action that requires strenuous effort and long hours can be made into an act of sacrifice. If we have to put in extra hours of work, we have to sacrifice our leisure time in the process. We can think of those extra hours of work as an offering in a "yagnya" or sacrifice.

In other words, we need go through elaborate rituals with fire and butter and priests and so on. Any action can be converted into an act

of worship. When we donate, we can think that we are returning to Ishvara what was Ishvara's to begin with. When we go on a diet, we can imagine that we are conserving Ishvara's energy, and so on.

What is the rationale for "divinizing" all of our actions? The notion of doership and enjoyership, the two main obstacles to liberation, get progressively diluted. Instead of thinking "I did this" and "I enjoyed this", we begin to think that "Ishvara did it, and Ishvara gets the results". Consequently, our stress levels and worries begin to reduce as well.

This takes us back full circle to karma yoga, but with the added dimension of devotion. Karma yoga without bhakti yoga is incomplete. Without the attitude of devotion, we can potentially commit wrong or harmful actions that we will hesitate to perform in front of Ishvara. With devotion, karma yoga is complete.

Shri Krishna reveals the result of worshipful actions in the next shloka.

Notes:

1. Devotion comprises three aspects: seva (service), shraddha (faith) and Ishvara mahaanata (greatness of Ishvara)

Bhagavad Gita Verse 28, Chapter 9

*shubhaashubhaphalairavam mokshyase karmabandhanaihi |
sannyasayogayuktaatmaa vimukto maamupaishyasi || 28 ||*

In this manner, you will be free from the bonds of action and their auspicious and inauspicious results. Having engaged in this yoga of renunciation, you will be liberated and attain me.

shubhaashubha : auspicious and inauspicious
phalaihi : results
avam : in this manner
mokshyase : will be free
karmabandhanaihi : from bonds of action
sannyasayoga : yoga of renunciation
yuktaatmaa : engaged in
vimuktaha : becoming liberated
maam : me
upaishyasi : you will attain

What happens when we incorporate worship into our life? Shri Krishna says that we shall be free of the results of action. Our actions give us results in the form of joy, sorrow, profit, loss, win, loss. Freedom from results leads to liberation and attainment of Ishvara. This is the ultimate result of living a worshipful life.

This shloka takes us back to the topic of renunciation. In an earlier portion of the Gita, Shri Krishna had redefined "sannyasa" or renunciation as giving up of the attitude of doership, not the giving up of action and retiring to a hermitage. By submitting our actions and their results in Ishvara hands, we automatically attain renunciation because we have come to know that it is Ishvara who is doing and enjoying everything.

As an illustration, let's consider our boss at work. If we do not have confidence in our boss's authority and his ability to lead us, our job becomes complicated, heavy and burdensome. Before we begin a task, we are worried whether we are doing the right things, and also fear the consequences of making a mistake. But if we trust our boss's authority and his ability to give us right direction, we work effortlessly and fearlessly knowing that we are carrying out the boss's command, and that he will take care of us if something goes wrong.

Similarly, once we realize that it is the infinite Ishvara that is directing everything, our actions automatically become effortless and fearless. It is like working for the most powerful CEO or the most powerful President, it gives us that kind of a confidence and peace of mind. We know that Ishvara is making us do the right things, and that he will take responsibility for the results and the consequences.

Now, if Ishvara is running everything, does that mean that he is partial to those who surrender to him and those who do not? This is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 29, Chapter 9

*samoham sarvabhooteshu na me dveshyati na priyaha |
ye bhajanti tu maam bhaktyaa mayi te teshu chaapyaham || 29 ||*

I am the same to all beings, I do not hate nor favour any one. But, those who worship me faithfully, they are in me and I am in them.

Following the argument so far, one may have a doubt that Ishvara is somewhat partial to his devotees since he offers them liberation, not to others. Shri Krishna addresses this doubt by saying that he is absolutely impartial and that he does not hate or favour anyone. The difference in the result obtained is entirely up to the effort and qualification of the seeker.

Consider a mother who has to feed two sons. One is a wrestler, and one is an invalid. She will give a lot of heavy food to the wrestler, and easy to digest food to the invalid. She cannot be accused of favouring the wrestler because she is giving food based on his efforts and his constitution. Or consider the sun who provides the same heat and light to everyone. If you build a solar power plant, you can generate electricity. If you don't, you will not be able to do so.

Similarly, Ishvara is same and equal to everyone. In the Mahabharata, Shri Krishna gave Arjuna and Duryodhana. They could either use him or his powerful army for the war. Arjuna chose Shri Krishna and Duryodhana chose the army. It is the person who makes the right or wrong choice. We can either put a plug in the electrical socket or our finger. Electricity does not care, but the results will be different.

Now, if we truly devoted to our family for example, we do not see any barrier, difference, separation between our family and ourselves. Whatever do for them, it is as if we do it for us. Whatever they do for us, they do it as if they were doing it for themselves. Similarly, if we are truly devoted to Ishvara, we see him in us, and he sees us in him.

Here, the topic of sakaama and nishkaama is concluded (desire-oriented and desireless devotion). The topic of the glory of devotion is taken up next.

samaha : same
aham : I am
sarvabhooteshu : to all beings
na : no one
me : my
dveshyaha : hate
na : nor
priyaha : favour
ye : one who
bhajanti : worships
tu : but
maam : me
bhaktyaa : faithfully
mayi : in me
te : those
teshu : in them
cha : and
api : also

Notes

1. Earlier Shri Krishna had said that Ishvara is not in anyone. This contradiction is resolved if we consider that each statement is made based on one's perspective. If we are a devotee, Ishvara is in us and we are in Ishvara. If we are materialistic, Ishvara is not in us.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 30, Chapter 9

*api chetsuduraachaaro bhajate maamananyabhaak |
saadhureva sa mantavyaha samyagvyavasito hi saha || 30 ||*

Also, even if someone of extremely poor conduct worships me with wholehearted devotion, consider him a saint, for he has resolved very well.

Shri Krishna begins to explain the glory of bhakti or devotion with this shloka. He says that devotion is the easiest means of obtaining access to Ishvara. It is so easy that even a criminal, a sinner in the world can be considered a saint if he worships Ishvara with wholehearted devotion.

Why is bhakti so great as a means of accessing Ishvara? Bhakti has no prerequisites. It can be practiced by anyone at any stage in their life. There is financial, ancestral or intellectual requirement. Moreover, it is not alien to most of us. Many of us who grew up in the Indian tradition are already used to performing worship, even if it is for a minute in front of the deity in our living room. All we have to do is to expand this notion of worship to include everything we do.

Here, Shri Krishna says that if there is an individual that has extremely bad conduct, if he is the worst among sinners, if he starts worshipping Ishvara with single pointed devotion, this resolve is enough to uplift him to the status of a saint. The word "ananyabhaak" is very important in this shloka. It means that this person has shifted his attention from all worldly pursuits including name, fame, money and power. His only goal is Ishvara.

So this person may not look like a saint outwardly, but he should be considered a saint, just like one who has checked into a flight is considered to have already reached the destination, even if it will take some more time. Such a saint has begun to shift his identification or sense of "I-ness" from his body to the infinite Ishvara. But his resolve or his commitment to this path is most important. He should be "samyak vyavasitaha" which means well determined, and be able to absolutely understand as to what is the right thing for him.

If this resolve is so important, how does one go about it? How long does it take? We shall see this next.

api : also
chet : even if
suduraachaaraha : someone of extreme
poor conduct
bhajate : worships
maam : me
ananyabhaak : wholehearted devotion
saadhuhu : saint
saha : him
mantavyaha : consider
samyak : very well
vyavasitaha : resolved
hi : for
saha : he has

Bhagavad Gita Verse 31, Chapter 9

*kshipram bhavati dharmaatmaa shashvachhaantim nigachhati |
kaunteya pratijaanaahi na me bhaktaha pranashyati || 31 ||*

He becomes virtuous instantly and attains eternal peace. O Kaunteya, declare that my devotee never perishes.

kshipram : instantly
bhavati : he becomes
dharmaatmaa : virtuous
shashvat : eternal
shaantim : peace
nigachhati : attains
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
pratijaanaahi : declare
na : not
me : my
bhaktaha : devotee
pranashyati : perishes

Earlier we saw that the resolve towards devotion is most important. Shri Krishna further adds to that statement by saying that one who makes such a resolve attains eternal bliss and peace. He also urges Arjuna to make such a resolve towards devotion.

Many commentators explain the word "kshipram" by snapping their fingers. In other words, the amount of time it takes to snap your fingers is how long it takes to make a commitment, to make a resolve towards devotion of Ishvara. When this happens, Ishvara ensures that such a person becomes virtuous and attains everlasting happiness and peace.

As long as we harbour desires for worldly objects, we will never experience long-lasting happiness. But by performing actions in the worship of Ishvara, our notion of doership and enjoyership is destroyed because we are acting as agents of Ishvara. When doership and enjoyership is removed, desires are automatically eliminated, resulting in everlasting peace and bliss.

Now, there could be a situation where we work in the spirit of worship for while, but fall back into our old desire-prompted actions again. Shri Krishna says that as long as we have made a commitment to devotion, Ishvara will ensure that we do not fall, we do not perish. However, Shri Krishna is specific in his statement that the resolve has to come from the devotee, not from Ishvara. Ishvara may break a promise that he has made himself, but he will always stand by a resolve that is made by his devotee.

So therefore, a person who has the tendency to commit wrongdoing can also become a devotee. What other types of people can become devotees? We shall see next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 32, Chapter 9

*maam hi paartha vyapaashritya yepi syuhu paapayonayaha |
striyo vaishyaastathaa shoodraastepi yaanti paraam gatim || 32 ||*

Surely, O Paartha, even those who are born of sinful origin - women, traders, and also labourers, they attain the supreme state by taking refuge in me.

This is another shloka that has the potential to be misinterpreted if it is quoted out of context. Shri Krishna says that women, traders and labourers are born out of "paapa yoni" which literally means "sinful wombs". He says that women, traders and labourers are also equally qualified to become liberated through the path of devotion. So to properly understand the meaning, let us look at the historical context and the symbolism that underpins this shloka.

As we have seen so far, the Gita attempts to remove misconceptions about spirituality that were prevalent when it came out. One prevalent misconception that was present throughout history was that only the brahmin and the kshatriya communities were solely qualified for liberation. Any other community was termed as "sinful". Therefore, Shri Krishna vehemently refutes this misconception using the language that was prevalent at that time.

Now let's look at the symbolism by focusing on the attributes of the communities mentioned, not by focusing on their birth-given caste or gender. A "sinful origin" or "sinful womb" per this shloka symbolically refers to a low level of sattva guna, and a high level of rajas and tamas which causes such attachment to worldly matters.

How does that manifest in people? The quality of being too attached to children and family is termed as "women" in this shloka. Similarly a "trader" is too attached to money and commerce, and a "labourer" is too attached to the fruits of his own efforts. Unlike other types of spiritual practice that require a high level of detachment, bhakti or devotion does not require such a qualification. Therefore, Shri Krishna praises the path of devotion because anyone who has such deep attachments to worldly matters can attain liberation through devotion.

So, when even those with a material attachments can attain liberation through devotion, how do people with a high level of detachment

maam : me
hi : surely
paartha : O Paartha
vyapaashritya : taking refuge
ye : those
api : even
syuhu : who are
paapayonayaha : born of sinful origin
striyaha : women
vaishyaahaa : traders
tathaa : and also
shoodraaha : labourers
te : they
yaanti : attain
paraam : supreme
gatim : state

fare? This is covered next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 33, Chapter 9

*kim punarbraamhanaahaa punyaa bhaktaa raajarshayastathaa |
anityamasukham lokamimam praapya bhajasva maam || 33 ||*

What (to speak) again of pious brahmins and royal sages? Having obtained this impermanent world which is devoid of happiness, you should worship me.

kim : what
punaha : again
braamhanaahaa : brahmins
punyaahaa : pious
bhaktaahaa : devotees
raajarshayaha : king sages
tathaa : and
anityam : impermanent
asukham : devoid of happiness
lokam : world
imam : this
praapya : having obtained
bhajasva : worship
maam : me

Shri Krishna concludes the topic of the glory of devotion by asserting that everyone, including brahmins or sages who have renounced the world, as well as "raajarshis" or sages who have become kings. Having described the glory of devotion, he then instructs Arjuna to worship Ishvara.

In describing the glory of devotion, Shri Krishna highlighted three types of people. The worst kind of person is a sinner, who has such a high level of attachment to the material world that he is ready to harm others. A better type of person is a sinner who has a lower level of attachment to the material world such as a businessperson. Better than that person is someone like a sage who has the lowest level of attachment, which means that highest level of detachment or vairagya. It does not matter which kind of person wants to become a devotee. Everyone is eligible.

Shri Krishna also explains the reason for seeking the path of devotion. He says that the world in which we live in has two main defects. It is anityam or impermanent, and it is asukham or devoid of joy. We usually rush into worldly pursuits such as money, positions, wealth, fame, titles and so on. None of those are permanent or will give long-lasting happiness. We sometimes think that others who possess these things are happier than we are, but that is not true. Impermanence and sorrow is the nature of this world.

Therefore, Shri Krishna urges us to follow a single pursuit. How do we do it? He explains this in the next and concluding shloka in this chapter.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 34, Chapter 9

*manmanaa bhava madbhakto madyaajee maama namaskuru |
maamevaishyasi yuktvaivaamaatmaanam matparaayanaha || 34 ||*

Keep your mind in me, become my devotee, perform actions for me, surrender to me. In this manner, engage yourself in me. By making me your goal, you will attain only me.

manmanaahaa : keep your mind in me
bhava : do
madbhaktaha : become my devotee
madyaajee : perform actions for me
maam : me
namaskuru : surrender to
maama : me
eva : only
eshyasi : attain
yuktvaa : engaged in
evam : in this manner
aatmaanam : yourself
matparaayanaha : make me your goal

Shri Krishna concludes the ninth chapter with a "take home message". He gives us specific, tangible and practical instructions to bring the teachings of this chapter into our life. Having declared that this world is impermanent and devoid of joy, he wants us to follow a new way of life that orients us towards Ishvara and away from the world.

Let's look at the most important instruction first. Shri Krishna wants us to make Ishvara as our sole goal in life. How does this work in practice? If for instance, we are ready to go to college, it should be in line with our svadharma so that we get skilled in performing our work. If we want to get married, it should be with the intention of serving our family and our parents. Any time we serve someone else, we are serving Ishvara.

Now once this goal is set, everything else falls into place. Shri Krishna wants us to keep on contemplating Ishvara and perform all our actions for Ishvara. The more we do this, the more will our ego get subdued, and this is how we will convert ourselves into a true devotee. We may encounter people and situations that are unpleasant, disagreeable and not to our liking. Even in the midst of this we should bow down and surrender to Ishvara, knowing that it is our past actions that are manifesting as unpleasant but temporary situations.

What is the end result? If we are ever engaged with Ishvara throughout our lives, if we make Ishvara our goal and refuge, we will certainly attain him. This attainment is explained in the sixth chapter as "Yo maam pashyati sarvatra sarvam cha mayi pashyati". We will not view the world as different from us. We will see Ishvara in all, and all in Ishvara.

om tatsatiti shreematbhagavatgitasupanishadsu brahmavidyaayaam yogashaastre shreekrishnaarjunsamvade raajavidyaaraajaguhyayogo naama navamodhyaayaha || 9 ||

Summary of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 9

In the previous chapter, Shri Krishna described the endless cycle of creation and dissolution of the universe, and how all beings are stuck in that cycle. In this chapter, he began to reveal an extremely profound and secret knowledge to Arjuna that would allow him to escape this endless cycle. That knowledge is devotion or bhakti towards Ishvara. It is the easiest means of obtaining liberation, easier than performing rituals or penance or renouncing the world.

What is this knowledge? Ishvara is the ultimate cause of the universe. Everything is sustained by Ishvara. Everything is in Ishvara, like the wind is in space. We are not able to see Ishvara because our senses are preconditioned to only perceive names and forms, just like we see a blue sky where there is no real blue colour.

Ishvara becomes the ultimate cause of the universe through his power known as Prakriti. Through this power, he creates the world of names and forms, sustains them and eventually dissolves them. Prakriti is nothing but the three gunas. It is a fully automatic system that delivers results to individuals based on their actions. Most people are stuck in this system and cannot get out because they are bound by selfish actions, they are too attached. Ishvara is an observer of this system. he does not get bound by Prakriti because he is unattached.

In order to free ourselves from the entrapment in Prakriti, we have to change our conditioning and rid ourselves of all misconceptions regarding Ishvara. The first misconception : Ishvara is finite human entity. The second misconception : I am body, mind, intellect. Third misconception: worship of finite deities will give infinite and permanent results. One by one, each of these misconceptions is clarified.

The easiest way to dispel all these misconceptions is to worship Ishvara, to follow the path of bhakti. There are several ways to bring this into our daily life. We can constantly meditate upon Ishvara as the cause of everything. This is known as "jnayaana yagnya". We can perform actions in service of Ishvara. We can begin to see Ishvara in objects, people and situations through pointers. Shri Krishna provides several pointers. For instance, we can learn to see Ishvara in our parents, our grandparents, in the weather cycle and so on.

Next, Shri Krishna describes two kinds of devotees. The sakaama or desire-oriented devotee performs rituals so that he can attain heaven after his death, but ultimately comes back to earth after his merits are

exhausted. The nishkaama or desire-less devotee only wants Ishvara. In an oft-quoted shloka, Shri Krishna says that Ishvara always takes care of desire-less devotees by giving them what they need at the right point in their lives including food, shelter, wealth, knowledge and a teacher.

We also learn that Ishvara does not expect big offerings when we worship him. In fact, he is happy with simple things like water, leaf, fruit or flowers. We can also offer our work and action to him when we serve others. What he wants the most is the feeling of devotion when we make the offering. Ishvara is impartial like the sun and rain, and will reward us based on our faith and effort.

The glory of devotion is that it is accessible to everybody, from sinners to people of great worldly attachment all the way to sages. Everyone can worship at any point in their lives. There is no qualification to begin the path of devotion.

Shri Krishna ends this chapter with an actionable message. He says "Keep your mind in me, become my devotee, perform actions for me, surrender to me." This is the instruction for devotion towards Ishvara.

Vibhooti Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 10**Shree Bhagavan uvaacha:**bhooya eva mahaabaaho shrunu me paramam vachaha |
yattaham preeyamaanaaya vakshyaami hitakaamyayaa || 1 ||*

bhooyaha : again
 eva : also
 mahaabaaho : O mighty armed warrior
 shrunu : listen
 me : my
 paramam : supreme
 vachaha : statements
 yat : that which
 aham : I
 preeyamaanaaya : one who is delighted
 vakshyaami : I will say
 hitakaamyayaa : desiring well-being

Shree Bhagavan said: Again, O mighty armed warrior, listen to my supreme statements, which I will say to you filled with delight, desiring your well-being.

After concluding the ninth chapter, Shri Krishna did not wait for Arjuna to ask a question because he knew that Arjuna wanted to hear more. He continued speaking because Arjuna was taking delight in the teaching. Good teachers know when to take questions and when to continue teaching so that the student is engaged and encouraged.

This chapter of the Gita is known as "Vibhooti Yoga". It continues the theme of the seventh and ninth chapters by listing several vibhootis or expressions of Ishvara. Why are expressions important? Consider electricity which is invisible to our senses but is a source of great power. If we wish to learn more about electricity by watching a power outlet or a power line, we may not be able to understand electricity that much. But if we see a bright and colourful lamp, or medical equipment that helps save people's lives, it is easier to appreciate the glory of electricity.

Ishvara is infinitely powerful than electricity but is also invisible and unknown to our senses. Only through knowing his expressions can we become aware of his presence, and gradually expand our vision to see the one Ishvara in everything. Shri Krishna is concerned with Arjuna's well-being, so in that regard he wanted to reveal Ishvara's glories to Arjuna. He calls these glories "paramam" or supreme because they enable us to transcend this world of name and form and access Ishvara.

Why is Ishvara invisible and unknown to our senses, and to other beings in the universe? This is explained next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 10

*na me viduhu suraganaahaa prabhavam na maharshayaha |
ahamaadirhi devaanaam maharshinaam cha sarvashaha || 2 ||*

na : not
me : my
viduhu : know
suraganaahaa : gods
prabhavam : origin
na : nor
maharshayaha : great sages
aham : I
aadihi : cause
hi : for
devaanaam : of gods
maharshinaam : of great sages
cha : and
sarvashaha : in every aspect

Neither the gods nor the great sages know of my origin, for I am the cause of the gods and great sages in every aspect.

Previously, Shri Krishna declared that only Ishvara can speak about Ishvara's glories. Now, why should that be the case? Why can't someone else talk about Ishvara's glories? It is because Ishvara is the cause of everything in this entire universe. He is the "aadihi" or the first principle. He is the ultimate cause.

As we have seen earlier, most of us have an idea that a certain deity is almighty and all-powerful. But ultimately, all those gods and deities are emissaries of Ishvara. They came into existence much later than Ishvara. Similarly, great sages and wise people have also come into existence after Ishvara. Therefore, none of these individuals has the ability to clearly fathom the real nature of Ishvara.

For instance, imagine that you want to learn the history of a large corporation. You may research internet sites, you can talk to the current employees, you can even track down the original employees, but the only person who knows the entire history will be the company's founder. He can reveal details that only he knew at the time of founding the company. No one else can know these details.

So then, if Ishvara is the ultimate cause of the universe, then everything in the universe is an effect of that ultimate cause. An effect can never know its cause in totality. Therefore, the most qualified person to expound the glories himself is Ishvara himself, speaking through the form of Shri Krishna. Such a teaching is called "apaurusheya". It is not authored by a human, it has come from Ishvara directly.

As we hear more about the glories of Ishvara, we will need to delve deeper into what is meant by the term "ultimate cause". To prepare for this exploration, picture a potter creating a pot. There are two main ingredients that go into the pot. One is clay, the substance of which the pot is made. The other is the intelligence of the potter that decides the shape and the method to create it.

With this picture in mind, let us remember four things that will help us in understanding Ishvara. The pot is an effect. The pot has come from a cause. The "material cause" of the pot is clay. The intelligence, also known as the "efficient cause", is the potter. We will recall this example later in the chapter.

So then, what is the gain of learning about Ishvara and his glories? Shri Krishna explains this next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 10

*yo maamajamanaadim cha vetti lokamaheshwaram |
asammoodhaha sa martyeshu sarvapaapaihi pramuchhyate || 3 ||*

**One who knows me as birthless, causeless and lord of the universe,
he is wise among all humans and is freed from all sins.**

yaha : one who
maam : me
ajam : birthless
anaadim : causeless
cha : and
veti : knows
lokamaheshwaram : lord of the universe
asammoodhaha : wise
saha : he is
martyeshu : among humans
sarvapaapaihi : all sins
pramuchhyate : freed from

In this shloka, Shri Krishna says that one whose devotion in Ishvara has reached its pinnacle, one who understands Ishvara as the eternal lord of the universe, automatically develops this capacity of discrimination and becomes wise. Also, he is freed from all his sins. This is the end result of devotion.

The Gita places special emphasis on the quality of viveka or discrimination. It is the ability to differentiate between what is real and what is unreal. For some people, this comes easily but for most of us, it does not. Devotion is the solution. When we begin to hear about Ishvara's glories, our vision and understanding about his true nature increases. We begin to realize that while everything in the world has a beginning and end, Ishvara is beyond time. We begin to see that he is everywhere, he is not confined to a certain space or location.

So when we see that Ishvara is present everywhere and everytime, beyond the realm of time and space, we automatically begin to understand that everything else is finite and transient. Our reactions to situations become calmer. If we come across a tough situation, we know that the timeless ever present Ishvara is in there, and so therefore the situation will be temporary and will not bother us anymore. We become "assammodaha" or wise, beyond all delusion.

Also, by hearing these glories, we realize that Ishvara is the one who is running the universe. When we identify ourselves with the controller of the universe, our ego, sense of doership and enjoyership automatically drops because we know that we are doing nothing, it is all Ishvara's doing. When the sinner, which is nothing the sense of doership and enjoyership, is dropped, all our sins are destroyed in an instant.

Shri Krishna now begins to speak of Ishvara's expressions, which is the main theme of this chapter. He first speaks about Ishvara's inner, subtle expressions in the next few shlokas. He later speaks about his external, more visible expressions.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 10

*buddhirjnyaanamasammohaha kshamaa satyam damaha shamaha |
sukham duhkham bhavobhaavo bhayam chaabhayameva cha || 4 ||*

Intellect, wisdom, non-delusion, forgiveness, truth, external restraint, internal restraint, external restraint, joy and sorrow, creation and destruction, fear and sorrow.

buddhihi : intellect
jnyaanam : wisdom
asammohaha : non-delusion
kshamaa : forgiveness
satyam : truth
damaha : external restraint
shamaha : internal restraint
sukham : joy
duhkham : sorrow
bhavaha : creation
abhaavaha : destruction
bhayam : fear
cha : and
abhayam : fearlessness
eva : also

Shri Krishna begins describing Ishvara's vibhootis or expressions with this shloka. First, he describes Ishvara's subtle expressions in two shlokas. He says that intelligence, wisdom, non-delusion, forgiveness, self-restraint, joy and sorrow, creation and destruction, fear and fearlessness, all of these are expressions of Ishvara. Whenever we come across any of these expressions, we should immediately realize that it is Ishvara expressing himself through them.

"Buddhihi" or intellect is the ability to know subtle things, things that are not immediately perceived by our senses. Our tongue may enjoy fried food, but our intellect will tell us not to indulge in it due to the potential health risks. Now, none of our senses saw something called a "health risk" but our intellect did. Similarly, "jnyaana" or wisdom is the ability to discriminate between the eternal essence and everything else. Engaging with the world without getting deluded into thinking that it is the source of happiness, this is "asammoha" or non-delusion.

With the foundation of intellect, wisdom and non-delusion, we are ready to engage with the world. We may encounter people that speak ill of us or trouble us in some way. "Kshamaa" or forgiveness lets us drop any negative thinking that is generated out of such interactions. Conversely, it is our duty to convey to others what we perceive of the world without adding any modifications or distortions. This is known as "satyam" or truthfulness. We may also encounter people, objects and situations that generate selfish desires within us. In order to guard against chasing after them, we need to cultivate "dama" or sense control, and "shama" which is control over the mind.

Now, let us examine Ishvara's manifestations that come in pairs. We usually tend to be attracted towards one aspect of the pair and run away from the other aspect. First let us look at "sukham" and "duhkham" or joy and sorrow. We prefer joyful situations and tend to avoid sorrowful ones. We prefer "bhaavaha" or creation but dislike "abhaavaha"

or destruction. We like to be "abhaya" or fearless, not "bhaya" or fearlessness.

Shri Krishna wants us to remain equanimous, remain balanced in both aspects of these pairs. Ishvara may send a sorrowful situation in order to create further vairagya or dispassion. Like a municipality that demolishes a dangerously unlivable building, he may destroy a person, object or situation so that a new one can be created in its place. Like a robber who is afraid of a burglary alarm, he may generate fear in us so that we do not commit an unlawful or unethical act.

The second part of this topic is covered in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 10

*ahimsaa samataa tushtistapo daanam yashoyashaha |
bhavanti bhaavaa bhootaanaam matta eva prithagvidhaahaa || 5 ||*

ahimsaa : non-injury
samataa : equanimity
tushtihi : contentment
tapaha : penance
daanam : charity
yashaha : fame
ayashaha : infamy
bhavanti : occur
bhaavaaha : arise
bhootaanaam : of living beings
mattaha : from me
eva : only
prithagvidhaahaa : various

Non-injury, equanimity, contentment, penance, charity, fame and infamy, these various states of living beings arise from me only.

Shri Krishna continues to describe Ishvara's subtle expressions in this shloka. He begins with the description of "ahimsaa" or non-injury. Non-injury typically is understood as refraining from physically hurting a living being. But more broadly, it means refraining from depriving someone else of happiness, knowledge and finitude. For instance, if we cheat someone or we insult someone, we are not practising non-injury.

Next is "samataa" or equanimity. The second chapter speaks elaborately on the quality of equanimity or balance as paramount to the performance of karma yoga. If external factors such as heat, cold, praise and censure destabilize our mind, it means that our ego is attached to those factors and disturbs the balance of our mind. Maintaining equanimity in such situations is a sign of healthy detachment and dispassion.

"Tushtihi" or contentment refers to "prasaada buddhi", or the ability to accept everything in life, good or bad, joyful or sorrowful, as a gift from Ishvara. If we are constantly unhappy with what life gives us, we are failing to recognize the infinitude of our eternal essence, and are instead attached to our limited, finite ego.

"Tapaha" or penance refers to the energy that builds up in our body when we practice restraint of our sense organs. For example, if we refrain for talking for a day, that energy is conserved within our body and generates heat which is known as "tapas". "Daanam" or charity refers to donating or distributing our wealth so that we do not get into the practice of hoarding.

"Yasha" is the fame that comes through pursuit of dharma or lawful conduct, and "ayashaha" is the infamy that results through the pursuit of adharma or unlawful conduct.

Shri Krishna concludes this topic by asserting that all of these qual-

ities are generated in us by none other than Ishvara. However, there is a set of rules that govern the creation of these qualities. It does not happen randomly or in an ad-hoc manner. It is our karma or actions that determine which qualities or states will arise within us. If we constantly surround ourselves with good company, we will automatically imbibe good qualities and vice versa.

So far, Shri Krishna has described Ishvara's subtle expressions. We now will be going to see Ishvara's tangible, visible expressions starting from the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Chapter 6, Verse 10

*maharshayaha sapta poorve chatvaaro manavastathaa |
madbhaavaa maanasaa jaataa yeshaam loka imaahaa prajaahaa || 6 ||*

The seven great sages and the four before them, and the Manus were contemplating me. They were born out of my mind, (they) of whom are the creatures in this world.

maharshayaha : great sages
sapta : seven
poorve : prior to that
chatvaaraha : the four
manavaha : the Manus
tathaa : as well as
madbhaavaahaa : contemplating me
maanasaaaha : my mind
jaataahaa : born out of
yeshaam : of whom
loke : in this world
imaahaa : these
prajaahaa : creatures

Previously, Shri Krishna spoke about Ishvara as the cause of several subtle expressions including non-injury, penance and so on. He now enumerates Ishvara's manifest, visible expressions. Per tradition, the entire universe was created by seven great sages and fourteen individuals known as "Manus". Shri Krishna asserts that these sages and Manus, the creators of all living and inert beings in this universe, were themselves created by Ishvara through his mind.

The Srimad Bhagavatam described the creation of the universe in great detail. Ishvara first created Lord Brahma and entrusted him with the responsibility of creating the universe. Lord Brahma then created the four child-sages Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanaatana and Sanatkumaara. When he asked them to populate the world, they refused, because they did not want to get tangled in any material pursuits. They took the vow of celibacy and roamed the world, constantly contemplating upon Ishvara.

Next, Lord Brahma created the saptarishis or the seven great sages Bhrigu, Marichi, Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratuhu and Vasishta. He then created Manu who was entrusted with further procreation and establishment of the moral code, which is known as Manusmriti. There are fourteen Manus that correspond to fourteen Manvantaras or periods of Manu.

Having enumerated the creators of his universe, Shri Krishna says that all those original individuals are expressions that were created from Ishvara's mind, just like we create whole new worlds in our dreams in a matter of seconds without any external materials. This shloka is similar to the biblical verse "Let there be light". The idea is the same - that Ishvara is the original cause of everything.

What is the result of knowing Ishvara's vibhootis or expressions? This is given in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 10

*etaam vibhootim yogam cha mama yo vetti tatvataha |
sovikampena yogena yujyate naatra samshayaha || 7 ||*

etaam : this
vibhootim : manifestation
yogam : yoga
cha : and
mama : my
yaha : he who
veti : understands
tatvataha : in essence
saha : he
avikampena : unperturbed
yogena : with yoga
yujyate : engages
na : not
atra : any
samshayaha : doubt

He who understands this, my manifestation and yoga in its essence; he becomes engaged with unperturbed yoga, without a doubt.

What is the result of hearing about Ishvara's expressions? Shri Krishna says that one who is able to perceive Ishvara as manifesting through expressions becomes established in "avikampena yoga" or a constant, unshakeable connection with Ishvara.

Vibhooti refers to the multiple or pluralistic manifestation of Ishvara, the presence of Ishvara in all forms present in the universe. Yoga, also known as yoga-maaya, is the power that makes this pluralistic manifestation possible. Shri Krishna says that one who knows this vibhooti and yoga as arising from Ishvara is constantly united with Ishvara.

The key here is to develop a vision that goes into the essence of any object or person or situation instead of getting distracted by the form, just like a scrap metal dealer's vision goes straight into the metal, and not the shape.

How do we develop this vision? Let us bring back the concept of material cause and intelligent cause that we saw earlier. A pot is created by two aspects: the material cause which is clay, and the intelligent cause which is the potter. So for instance, when Shri Krishna said that the seven sages were created by Ishvara, it means that Ishvara is both the "stuff" and the "sculptor". He is both the material and intelligent cause of those sages. The Mundaka Upanishad illustrates this concept with the example of a spider who creates a web from his own body, using no other external raw material. The spider becomes the material cause and the intelligent cause of the web.

So if our thoughts are made of Ishvara, objects are made of Ishvara, situations are made of Ishvara, if we develop this vision, what will happen to us? We will get established in an unshakeable, unwavering connection with Ishvara. In other words, if we know that Ishvara is present in everything, we will never be disconnected from Ishvara, just like our cell phones are never disconnected from their network no matter which part of the country we visit. We will be able to

encounter every situation in life with poise and equanimity, without being shaken up, because everything is ultimately Ishvara.

This state of unwavering yoga is elaborated upon in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 10

*aham sarvasya prabhavo mattaha sarvam pravartate |
iti matvaa bhajante maam budhaa bhaavasamanvitaahaa || 8 ||*

I am the cause of everything, everything originates from me. Realizing this, wise individuals filled with this attitude worship me.

aham : I
sarvasya : everything
prabhavaha : cause
mattaha : from me
sarvam : everything
pravartate : originates
iti : this
matvaa : realizing
bhajante : worship
maam : me
budhaahaa : wise individuals
bhaavasamanvitaahaa : filled with this attitude

"Avikampena yoga", the unwavering, unshakeable yoga, is defined by Shri Krishna as knowing that Ishvara is the cause of everything, and that everything originates from Ishvara. Those who have established themselves in this yoga are "budhaa", they are wise. They only worship or contemplate upon Ishvara, remaining unaffected by the ups and downs in life.

Imagine an adult and a child walking inside a haunted house within an amusement park. Though both of them see and hear the same things, they have different reactions. The child thinks that the ghosts and the eerie noises are real and becomes afraid. The adult knows that everything inside is fake, it is unreal. So enjoys the thrill of the haunted house without being afraid.

The difference between the adult and the child is that the adult has knowledge about the cause of the ghosts and the noises. Similarly, Shri Krishna says that one who knows Ishvara as the cause of everything will develop an extremely positive attitude towards life. He will take failures as learning opportunities, not as triggers for depression. He will never question why something bad happened to him, knowing that it is a result of his prior actions.

One who has developed such an outlook towards life will worship Ishvara at all times. This is indicated by the worlds "maam bhajante". He will experience sorrow only if he forgets that Ishvara is the cause of everything. When one has understood that Ishvara, as the cause of everything, also is the ultimate goal, then they become totally immersed in Ishvara, as described in the next shloka.

Bhagavat Gita Verse 9, Chapter 10

*macchittaa madgatapraanaa bodhayantaha parasparam |
kathayantashcha maam nityam tushyanti cha ramanti cha || 9 ||*

macchittaa : their mind absorbed in me
madgatapraanaa : their life force
absorbed in me
bodhayantaha : educating
parasparam : each other
kathayantaha : conversing
cha : and
maam : my
nityam : daily
tushyanti : contentment
ramanti : delight

Their mind absorbed in me, their life force absorbed in me, educating each other and conversing with each other about me daily, they find contentment and delight.

Having described the state of avikampa yoga or the yoga of unwavering devotion, Shri Krishna now describes the state of the unwavering devotee. He says that their minds are always absorbed in contemplating Ishvara and their entire lives are submitted in extolling the virtues of Ishvara. This gives them an eternal source of joy and contentment.

The Swiss are known for running their trains with near-perfect precision. If the train has to leave the platform at 9:30 am, it will leave the station not one second earlier or later. So whenever we have to board a train in Switzerland, there will never be a doubt in our mind as to whether the train will be on time or not. Our faith in the precision of their train system is unshakeable.

Similarly, when we our faith in Ishvara becomes firm, we do not go running towards other sources of joy in the world. We recognize that the universe operates under Ishvara's laws, and that any pleasant or unpleasant situations that we encounter are a result of our prior actions. They are not random or arbitrary. Our likes and dislikes will slowly thin down. We will take every situation as a learning experience and keep our focus on Ishvara.

Shri Krishna says that when devotees gain such a strong faith and conviction in Ishvara, they do not think about anything else. Like cricket fans who eat, sleep, breathe and talk about cricket, the devotees converse about Ishvara, educate each other about Ishvara and dedicate their mind and senses to Ishvara.

Why do they do this? They only find contentment and joy in Ishvara since they do not need to run towards material objects for happiness. They revel in Ishvara. This is the difference between an ordinary seeker and a serious seeker. An ordinary seeker is interested in Ishvara "also", whereas a serious seeker is interested in Ishvara "only".

When such tremendous devotion is poured into Ishvara, the result should be something extraordinary. What is it? This is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 10

*teshaam satatayuktaanaam bhajataam preetipoorvakam |
dadaami buddhiyogam tam yena maamupayaanti te || 10 ||*

Those who are constantly engaged (in me) and worship with devotion, I endow them with the yoga of intellect by which they attain me.

teshaam : those
satatayuktaanaam : constantly engaged
bhajataam : worship
preetipoorvakam : with devotion
dadaami : I endow
buddhiyogam : yoga of intellect
tam : that
yena : by which
maam : me
upayaanti : attain
te : they

Earlier we saw that dedicated, serious devotees of Ishvara find joy only in conversing and immersing themselves in Ishvara. Such a high degree of "preetipurvaka bhajan" or worship with joy and devotion can only yield a wonderful result. Those who display such ardent devotion as termed "sataya yuktaanam" by Shri Krishna because they are constantly connected to Ishvara. He says that Ishvara rewards such devotees with "buddhi yoga", a superior form of intellect and understanding.

Typically, we would have expected Ishvara to reward his ardent devotees with material prosperity. This is a given, since we have already heard Shri Krishna say that Ishvara will carry the material burden of his devotees in the previous chapter. But that is a lower form of blessing or reward. The highest type of blessing that can be given to a devotee is not material, it is intellectual. No object, wealth, social status or possession can stand in front of the knowledge of the true nature of things.

What is the result of this intellectual understanding? It is the ability to see Ishvara in everything, and everything in Ishvara. If someone tells us that the necklace we had lost is actually around our neck, we do not have to do anything or go anywhere in order to find it. We know where to look for it. Similarly, this vision given to us by Ishvara enables us to see him everywhere and in everything. It is the vision of equanimity mentioned in the sixth chapter.

So then, what is the main obstacle that Ishvara removes with this knowledge? Shri Krishna explains in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 10

*teshaamevaanukampaarthamahamajnyaanajam tamaha |
naashayaamyaatmabhaavastho jnaanadeepena bhaasvataa || 11 ||*

For those, only out of compassion, I dispel darkness residing in their hearts, born of ignorance, by lighting the brilliant lamp of knowledge.

teshaam : for those people
eva : only
anukampaartham : out of compassion
aham : I
ajnyaanajam : born of ignorance
tamaha : darkness
naashayaami : I dispel
aatmabhaavasthaha : residing in their hearts
jnaanadeepena : lamp of knowledge
bhaasvataa : brilliant

Shri Krishna paints a beautiful picture to illustrate Ishvara's grace that was explained in the previous shloka. Like a lamp that is lit to dispel darkness, Ishvara, out of sheer compassion, ignites the yoga of intellect which removes ignorance from the hearts of serious devotees.

The renowned Shankaraachaarya has elaborated upon this illustration in his Gita commentary. His illustration is comprised of the lamp with a lamp holder, wick, and oil. The lamp holder is the quality of vairagya or dispassion, the wick is brahmacharya or continence and the oil is prasaada buddhi or the willingness to accept everything in life as Ishvara's blessing. The lamp is nourished by a gentle breeze in the form of constant devotion to Ishvara, but can be extinguished by an impure mind containing strong likes and dislikes.

With these two shlokas, Shri Krishna summarizes the path of the bhakti marga or devotional means to attain Ishvara. In bhakti, Ishvara's grace is emphasized rather than individual effort. In the Indian tradition this is pictorially depicted by comparing a monkey with a cat. In "markatanyaya", the method of the monkey, a baby monkey has to hang on to its mother with its own effort. But in "marjalanyaya", the method of the cat, a kitten does not have to do anything because its mother holds her by its neck.

Likewise, Ishvara takes care of his devotees. He will ensure that their material needs are taken care of. But more importantly, he will ensure that all our ignorance is destroyed and that we are educated spiritually. This is in contrast with other paths to Ishvara that require significant self effort. There is no need to roll any beads or sit in any postures. All that is required is surrender.

With these words, Shri Krishna stopped speaking and Arjuna, excited by the topic, started praising him.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 10**Arjuna uvaacha:**param brahma param dhaama pavitram paramam bhavaan |
purusham shaashvatam divyamaadidevamajam vibhum || 12 ||*

param : supreme
 brahma : absolute
 dhaama : abode
 pavitram : pure
 bhavaan : you are
 purusham : person
 shaashvatam : eternal
 divyam : divine
 aadidevam : original deity
 ajam : beyond birth
 vibhum : all-pervading

Arjuna said: You are the supreme absolute, the supreme abode, supremely pure. You are the divine eternal person, the original deity who is beyond birth, all-pervading.

Over the course of the previous chapters, Arjuna gained an understanding of the real nature of Ishvara, and of Shri Krishna as an avatara, a divine manifestation of Ishvara. This understanding prompted him to praise Ishvara, and that is what we will see in the next few shlokas.

Arjuna spoke of Ishvara as "parama brahman" which is the absolute reality, the eternal essence that was spoken of in the second chapter. He understood that Ishvara's real nature is beyond time and space, it is that which is the support of time and space. Ishvara is "parama dhaaman", the supreme goal, the ultimate abode of all beings. Ishvara is also the supreme purifier, as he destroys all traces of impurities in the form of ignorance.

The word "purusha" literally means, one who fills the body. Ishvara is the "divyam shaashvatam purusha", the divine eternal person the comprises the entire universe, just like all of the cells in our body are termed as "body" in aggregate. Ishvara is divine because he is beyond the realm of impermanence caused by maaya. He is "ajam", beyond birth, but is the cause of everyone else's birth. He is "vibhum" which is all-pervading, he alone appears as everything.

Like the Vishnu Sahasranaam that enumerates a thousand names of Ishvara, this shloka can be used as a prayer to meditate upon Ishvara's glories. Now, did only Arjuna think that this was the real nature of Ishvara or did others as well? Arjuna takes this up in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 10

*aahustvaamrishayaha sarve devarshinaaradastathaa |
asito devalo vyaasaha soyayam chaiva braveeshi me || 13 ||*

All the great sages and royal sages such as Naarada, Asita, Devala and Vyaasa speak this, and also you have said it to me.

Further praising Ishvara, Arjuna added that several eminent individuals, over the course of history, have also praised Ishvara. He listed the names of the renowned sages Naarada, Asita, Devala and Vyaasa in this regard.

The Srimad Bhagavatam speaks of Naarada as the son of a maid-servant who served several priests. He grew up in an environment of spirituality and decided to seek the absolute truth in a forests after his mother passed away. His meditation bore fruit when he had a vision of Ishvara. After his death, he was reborn as the sage Naarada that many of us are familiar with. Naarada was learned in all the arts and sciences. He could travel anywhere in the universe, and talk to any deity that he wished.

Another sage mentioned here is Devalaha who was the son of a great sage named Asita, who was born as a result of Asita's prayer to Lord Shiva. It is said that Devalaha was cursed by a celestial maiden named Rambha for not agreeing to marry her. He was reborn as Sage Ash-tavakra, who is famous for writing the Ashtavakra Gita. And of course, Sage Krishna Dvaipayana Vyaasa is the author of the great Indian epic Mahabhaarata.

So therefore, Arjuna accepted the authority of Shri Krishna to convey the true nature of Ishvara. But did he have any doubts or objections?

aahuhu : speak
tvaam : to you
rishayaha : sages
sarve : all
devarshihi : divine sages
naaradasha : Naarada
tathaa : also
asitaha : Asita
devalaha : Devala
vyaasaha : Vyaasa
svyayam : yourself
cha : and
eva : also
braveeshi : said
me : to me

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 10

*sarvametadritam manye yanmaam vadasi keshava |
na hi te bhagavanvyaktim vidurdevaa na daanavaahaa || 14 ||*

What you are speaking to me, O Keshava, I acknowledge all this to be true. For O Lord, neither the deities nor the demons know your manifestation.

Since the start of the Gita, we have seen Arjuna speak whenever he has a doubt or needs further clarification. With this shloka, Arjuna acknowledges that he has completely understood the true nature of Ishvara since the knowledge is coming from the source, from Ishvara himself.

It is interesting to note the use of the name "Keshava" to refer to Shri Krishna. "Ka" represents Lord Brahma and "Isha" represents Lord Shiva. So Keshava is the one who harmonizes the powers of creation and destruction. In other words, Ishvara creates, sustains and dissolves the universe of names and forms.

Since Ishvara is the origin of everything, Arjuna says that no deity, human or demon can claim to know Ishvara in totality because Ishvara came before any of them. Another interpretation of this statement is that no sense organ such as the eye or ear can claim to know Ishvara. Unlike worldly knowledge about objects, the knowledge of Ishvara can only be known as a subject. Tulsidas says this poetically in the Tulsī Ramayana : "Jaanat tumahi tumahi hui jaayi". One who knows you becomes you. All sense of individuality, the sense of I, the subject, goes away when one merges into Ishvara.

So then, if no deity, human or demon can know Ishvara, who can? Arjuna gives the answer in the next shloka.

sarvam : all
etat : this
ritam : truth
manye : acknowledge
yat : whatever
maam : to me
vadasi : speak
keshava : O Keshava
na : neither
hi : for
te : to you
bhagavan : O Lord
vyaktim : manifestation
viduhu : know
devaaha : deities
na : nor
daanavaahaa : demons

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 10

*svayamaatmanaatmaanam vettha tvam purushottama |
bhootabhaavana bhootesha devadeva jagatpate || 15 ||*

Only you yourself know of your true nature, O foremost among all, creator of all beings, lord of all beings and nourisher of this universe.

svayam : yourself
aatmanaa : of the true nature of the self
aatmaanam : by the self
vettha : know
tvam : you
purushottama : foremost among all
bhootabhaavana : creator of all beings
bhootesha : lord of all beings
devadeva : lord of all deities
jagatpate : nourisher of the universe

Previously, Arjuna said that Ishvara cannot be completely understood through our eyes and ears. But, being eager to still know Ishvara, he began using several words to describe Ishvara in this shloka. He also acknowledges that only Ishvara can know Ishvara, since there was nothing prior to Ishvara. Ishvara is self-evident, just like we do not need another source of light to see the sun.

Arjuna addressed Ishvara as "purushottama", the foremost and eminent person, beyond all cause and effect. He is "bhootabhaavana", the origin of all beings, the absolute reality that has taken maaya as an upaadhi or qualifier to create this world of names and forms. He is also "bhootesha", the master and lord of all beings.

Even though he is the controller, he is not someone who is a cruel master. He is "devadeva", the lord of all deities including Indra and Varuna, someone who is revered and adored. Also, Ishvara does not quit once the world is created. He is also "jagatpate", the protector and nourisher of the universe. However, we need to understand that, like a magician, Ishvara is never affected by the magic show. He is the cause, and the magic show of the universe is the effect.

So, if Ishvara can alone know Ishvara, only Ishvara can reveal his glories. Arjuna takes this up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 10

*vaktumarhasyasheshena divyaa hyaatmavibhootayaha |
yaabhirvibhootibhirlokaanimaanstvam vyaapya tishthasi || 16 ||*

Only you are capable of describing your divine expressions in totality. You are established in the universes by pervading them with these expressions.

Arjuna, eager to know the true nature of Ishvara, now understood that Ishvara is not some third party that creates and sustains the universe by standing outside of it. To that end, he acknowledges that Ishvara is part and parcel of the universe by saying that Ishvara has established himself by pervading the entire universe with his manifestations and expressions. It is like saying that the Internet, by pervading our every activity, has established itself in our

life.

With this realization, Arjuna begins to request Shri Krishna to give him a detailed understanding of Ishvara's expressions. Since Ishvara is the origin, the first cause, only Ishvara in the form of Shri Krishna is capable or competent to reveal his true nature to Arjuna.

For example, only a really old person who was alive during the Indian freedom struggle can reveal details to us that we may never hear about or read about anywhere else. Similarly, only Ishvara can reveal his divine opulence and glories. It is said that the Vedas, also known as "shruti", are the mouthpiece of Ishvara. The Gita has been derived from the Vedas.

Arjuna, having praised Ishvara, now begins asking his question in the next shloka.

vaktum : describing
arhasi : you are capable
asheshena : in totality
divyaahaa : divine
hi : only
aatma : your
vibhootayaha : expressions
yaabhihi : which
vibhootibhihi : by expressions
lokaan : universes
imaan : these
tvam : you
vyaapya : by pervading
tishthasi : established

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 10

*katham vidyaamaham yogimstvaam sadaa parichintayan |
keshu keshu cha bhaaveshu chintyosi bhagavanmayaa || 17 ||*

O Yogin, how shall I know you by remaining constantly engrossed in meditation? And O Lord, by which expressions are you to be meditated upon by me?

katham : how
vidyaam : shall know
aham : I
yogin : O yogin
stvaam : your
sadaa : constantly
parichintayan : engrossed in meditation
keshu : by which
cha : and
bhaaveshu : expressions
chintyaha : meditated upon
asi : can
bhagavan : O lord
mayaa : by me

Arjuna, having heard just a sample of Ishvara's expressions, was not satisfied with what he had heard. He wanted to know the technique by which he could constantly be reminded of Ishvara, and consequently, remain established in the contemplation of Ishvara. That is why in this shloka, Arjuna asked Shri Krishna to reveal more of his expressions.

When we wake up in the morning, we probably get five to ten minutes, at most, of a calm mind. Then, when our daily routine starts, our mind takes over and we are pulled into a rollercoaster ride of worry and sorrow. In the midst of all this it is difficult to bring in a divine thought for a minute, let alone contemplate on Ishvara constantly. Addressing Shri Krishna as Yogin, one who has the power of sovereignty, Arjuna asked him for a solution to overcome this predicament.

Furthermore, if we were told once that Ishvara is the cause of everything, and we are able to hold on to that fact, we need not have to worry about forgetting Ishvara. But because of our conditioning that has built up over a long period of time, and because of our ego - our sense that "I do everything" - is so strong, we need more support to counter that conditioning. We need a step-by-step approach, a list of Ishvara's expressions, just like kids have to be told that a TV, a radio, a computer, all operate using electricity.

Now, if such a list of Ishvara's expressions is needed, it cannot be terse and brief. It needs to be detailed. This is what Arjuna requests in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 10

*vistarenaatmano yogam vibhootim cha janaardana |
bhooyaha kathaya truptirhi shrunavato naasti memritam || 18 ||*

**Elaborately describe your yoga and expressions again, O Janaardana.
I am not satisfied by listening to your nectar-like (words).**

vistarena : elaborately
aatmanaha : your
yogam : yoga
vibhootim : expressions
cha : and
janaardana : O Janaardana
bhooyaha : again
kathaya : describe
truptirhi : satisfied
shrunavataha : listening
na : not
asti : is
me : my
amritam : nectar-like

So far, Shri Krishna just gave a taste of Ishvara's expressions. Arjuna clearly was relishing and enjoying hearing these expressions because he compared them to the sweetness of nectar. He wanted to hear them all over again. But this time, he would not be content with hearing so little. He requested Shri Krishna to give a detailed and elaborate description of Ishvara's expressions as well as yoga, the power of maaya that creates many expressions of the one Ishvara.

Arjuna addressed Shri Krishna as "Janaardana" which has two meanings. "Arda" means one who moves, or makes others move. Jana means people, and therefore Janaardana means one who moves people to heaven or hell, in other words, dispenses justice to evildoers. Another meaning of Janaardana is one whom people ask for prosperity and well being. Arjuna understood that the true nature of Shri Krishna was Ishvara.

With this shloka, Shri Krishna concluded his statements and requests. Starting with the next shloka, Shri Krishna will provide a total of 72 vibhootis or expressions of Ishvara. Most of these are drawn from the Indian Vedic and Puraanic tradition since Arjuna would be easily able to identify with and connect with those examples. We can try to look for similarities in the present time so that we are also able to connect with those.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 10**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**hanta te kathayishyaami divyaa hyaatmavibhootayaha |
praadhaanyataha kurushreshtha naastyanto vistarasya me || 19 ||*

hanta : Of course
 te : you
 kathayishyaami : I will tell
 divyaahaa : divine
 hi : for
 atma : my
 vibhootayaha : expressions
 praadhaanyataha : significant
 kurushreshtha : O best of the Kurus
 na : no
 asti : is
 antaha : end
 vistarasya : extent
 me : my

Shree Bhagavaan said:Of course. I will tell you my most significant divine expressions, O best of the Kurus. For there is no end to the extent (of my expressions).

So far, Arjuna expressed interest and enthusiasm for hearing Ishvara's manifestations and expressions in detail. Shri Krishna, delighted with Arjuna's request, replied by saying "hanta". The word hanta has three meanings. It is used to express excitement, wonder or dejection. In this context, Shri Krishna was happy and eager to speak about Ishvara's glories, so the meaning here is with regards to excitement.

Let us go back to our electricity example. There are thousands upon thousands of objects that use electricity. It is impossible to enumerate all of them. But it is possible to list those objects that are mighty, powerful, or have the capacity to elicit wonder and awe. Similarly, Shri Krishna admitted that though it would not be possible to list all of Ishvara's glories and expressions because they are infinite. However, he would be able to list the most significant ones.

As we go through the list of Ishvara's expressions in the upcoming shlokas, we may tend to get carried away by the richness of the stories, the mythology, the history and so on. While that is good and has its place, let us not forget the main point, which is to keep our mind established in the thought that "Ishvara is in everything".

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 10

*ahamaatmaa gudaakesha sarvabhootaashayastithaha |
ahamaadishcha madhyam cha bhootaanaamanta eva cha || 20 ||*

I am the self, established in the hearts of all beings, O Gudakesha. I am the beginning, middle and also the end of all beings.

Addressing Arjuna as Gudaakesha, the conqueror of sleep, Shri Krishna begins to describe the 72 expressions of vibhootis of Ishvara from this shloka onwards. He lists the two most important ones first. He says that Ishvara is the self, the "I" that is in the hearts of every being in the universe. Ishvara is also the start, middle and end of all beings in the universe.

So what exactly does "self" mean? Let us try to understand its opposite meaning first. When we treat a thing or a person as something different from us, something external to us, then we are creating a subject-object relationship where the subject is our "I" and the object is "him" or "her".

For instance, if we take an acquaintance out to dinner, for example, we may ask him to pay his bill separately. There is a sense of separateness between us and the acquaintance. Separating, externalizing, objectifying - all this is the opposite of self-hood.

But if we take our spouse or our child to dinner, we don't even think twice to pay for their dinner. This is because we do not consider a spouse or a child different or external to us. The sense of self-hood is greater here than with a stranger or with an acquaintance. Shri Krishna says that when this sense of selfhood expresses itself in our hearts, we should know that it is Ishvara's primary expression. If we can remember this constantly, if we can treat everything and every one as no different than ourselves, we do not have to remember any other expression of Ishvara. We are done.

So what is the practical implication of understanding Ishvara in this manner? Our sense of I-ness and my-ness automatically drops. There will be nothing in us that asserts "my will", "my plan", "my thinking", "I am going to do this" and so on. It will all become Ishvara's will, Ishvara's plan, Ishvara's thinking, Ishvara's doing. All worries and anxieties will disappear because the "I" who worries is no longer

aham : I
aatmaa : self
gudaakesha : O Gudakesha
sarvabhoota : all beings
aashaya : heart
stithaha : established
aham : I
aadihi : beginning
madhyam : middle
cha : and
bhootaanaam : of the beings
anta : end
eva : also

present.

If we are not able to comprehend Ishvara as our own self, then Shri Krishna provides another expression of Ishvara. He says that we should think of Ishvara as the one who creates, sustains and dissolves all the names and forms in the universe, just like the ocean creates, sustains and dissolves all waves. If we can think in this manner, Ishvara becomes all-pervading, ever present at all times.

Now, thinking Ishvara as the self, or as the beginning, middle and end of all beings, is difficult when we are beginners. For most of us, it is easier to see Ishvara in tangible people and objects. We will see those types of expressions in the following shlokas.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 21, Chapter 10

*aadityaanaamaham vishnurjyotishaam raviranshumaan |
mareechirmarutaamasmi nakshatraanaamaham shashee || 21 ||*

Among the Aadityaas I am Vishnu, among the bright objects I am the radiant sun, among the Marutas I am Mareechi, among the stars I am the moon.

aadityaanaam : among the Aadityaas
aham : I
vishnuhu : Vishnu
jyotishaam : among the bright objects
ravihi : sun
anshumaan : radiant
mareechihi : Mareechi
marutaam : among the Marutas
asmi : am
nakshatraanaam : among the stars
aham : I
shashee : moon

Shri Krishna begins enumerating Ishvara's expressions in this shloka. He begins by saying that among the Aadityaas or the sons of Aditi, he is Vishnu. The twelve sons of Aditi were Dhaataa, Mitra, Aryamaa, Rudra, Varuna, Soorya, Bhaga, Vivasvaan, Poosha, Savitaa, Tvashtaa and Vishnu. Vishnu also refers to the Vaamana avatar.

Next, Shri Krishna says that Ishvara is "Ravi", the sun, among all the bright objects in the universe. He uses the word "anshumaan" meaning radiant to describe the sun. So whenever we see the brilliance of the sun, our mind should immediately go towards the might of Ishvara that is shining through the sun. And just like Ishvara's luminosity is present in the sun during the day, it is present in the moon during the night.

There is an episode in the Sunder Kand of the Tulsi Ramayana where Lord Hanumaan was captured bound with ropes in Lanka. It is said that there are forty nine types of wind deities known as Marutas. Hanumaan was the son of the lord of wind, Vayu. When all forty nine types of winds began to blow, he untied himself of all the ropes and flew from building to building, burning each one with his flaming tail. Shri Krishna says that Mareechi, the prominent among the Marutas, is Ishvara's expression.

With these expressions in our mind, we will never be disconnected from Ishvara. In the day, we can look at the sun - it is Ishvara. When the winds blow, it is Ishvara. In the night, the moon is Ishvara.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 22, Chapter 10

vedaanaam saamavedosmi devaanaamasmi vaasavaha |
indriyaanaam manaschaasmi bhootaanaamasmi chetanaa || 22 ||

Among the Vedaas I am the Saama Veda, among the deities I am Vaasava, among the senses I am the mind and among the beings, I am the intellect.

vedaanaam : among the Vedas
 saamavedaha : Saama Veda
 asmi : I am
 devaanaam : among the deities
 asmi : I am
 vaasavaha : Vaasava
 indriyaanaam : among the senses
 manaha : mind
 cha : and
 asmi : I am
 bhootaanaam : among the beings
 asmi : I am
 chetanaa : intellect

Shri Krishna, elaborating on Ishvara's expressions, says that Ishvara is the Saama Veda among all the Vedas. Each Veda has a unique characteristic. The Yajur Veda contains prose, the Rig Veda contains metric hymns, the Saama Veda contains songs and the Atharva Veda contains incantations. Of these, the Saama Veda is Ishvara's expression, indicating his preference for music.

Among all the deities, Ishvara is the king of all deities known as Vaasava, also known as Indra. While our attention usually falls on the excesses of wealth and power that kings demonstrate, this was not the case traditionally. A king is supposed to spend every minute of his life serving his subjects, sacrificing everything. Such a rules of deities is a true expressions of Ishvara.

As we have seen earlier, we transact or interact with the world with our body, our senses, our organs of action, our mind and our intellect. The five senses and the five organs of action would be useless if not for the mind, that collects information from the senses and pulls together a complete picture of the world for us. It also instructs our organs to move, based on the inputs it receives. Shri Krishna says that this mind is an expression of Ishvara.

If we were to be born as a plant, animal or human, we would undoubtedly prefer to be born as a human. The key difference between a human and a plant or animal is the capacity of intelligence that lets us think logically, display compassion towards others, plan for the future and most importantly, pursue the path of the higher self. This wonderful intelligence in is is also Ishvara's expression.

So therefore, if our mind generates thoughts of compassion or service, if our intellect makes us acts upon these thoughts so that we can serve others, we should remember that it is not the "I" in us that is causing everything to happen. It is all happening through Ishvara and

his expressions.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 23, Chapter 10

*rudraanaam shankaraashchaasmi vitesho yaksharakshasaam |
vasoonaam paavakaashchaasmi meruhu shikharnaamaham || 23 ||*

Among the Rudras I am Shankara and among the Yakshas and Raakshasaas I am Vitesha. Among the Vasus I am the purifying fire and among the mountain peaks I am Meru.

rudraanaam : among the Rudas
shankaraha : Shankara
cha : and
asmi : I am
viteshaha : Vitesha
yaksha : Yakshas
rakshasaam : among Raakshasaas
vasoonaam : among Vasus
paavakaha : purifying fire
cha : and
asmi : I am
meruhu : Meru
shikharnaam : among mountain peaks
aham : I am

Shri Krishna goes on to describe Ishvara's expressions. He says that among the deities known as Rudras, he is Lord Shiva, the foremost among them. Rudras are deities that have been mentioned since Vedic times. Their name is derived from the root "rud" which means to cry or howl. They symbolically represent the vital life energies, and therefore make people cry when they leave the body.

It is said that there are eleven Rudras: Hara, Bahuroopa, Trayambaka, Aparajita, Vrishaakapi, Shambhu (Lord Shiva), Kapardin, Raivata, Mrigavyadha, Shaarva and Kapaalin. Shri Krishna says that Lord Shiva is Ishvara's expression because he is the calmest among them, and brings joy to his devotees.

Among the demigods known as the Yakshas and Rakshasaas, Ishvara is Vitesha who is also known as Kubera. Vitta means wealth, so Kubera is considered the lord of wealth. He is worshipped during the Lakshmi Pooja festival. Among the eight Vasus, deities who represent the elemental forces, Ishvara's expression is fire because it is the greatest purifier.

Next, Shri Krishna says that among the mountain peaks, Ishvara is the mountain known as Meru. It is considered the most prominent mountain and the centre of the universe in the Srimad Bhaagavatam, hence it is Ishvara's expression. The human spinal column is also known as "Meru danda" or the Meru rod, and the primary bead in a rosary is known as the Meru bead.

Whenever we see fire, mountains, wealth, or someone in sorrow due to punishment, we should remember Ishvara through his expressions of fire, Kubera, mount Meru and Lord Shiva.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 24, Chapter 10

*purodhasaam cha mukhyam maam viddhi paartha brihaspatim |
senaaneenaamaham skandaha sarasaamasmi saagaraha || 24 ||*

Among the spiritual teachers, know me as Brihaspati the foremost, O Paartha. Among the military commanders I am Skanda, and among water bodies I am the ocean.

Further enumerating Ishvara's expressions, Shri Krishna says that Ishvara is expressed as Brihaspati, who is the foremost among the spiritual teachers and the priests of the deities. Brihaspati is described in the Puraanaas as the "purodha" or guru of Indra, who is the king of all the deities. He was the son of Sage Angiras, one of the seven original rishis or Sapta-Rishis. His counterpart in the world of the demons or Asuras was Sage Shukrachaarya.

Next, Shri Krishna says that Isvara is expressed through Skanda, the most powerful army commander in the world. Skanda, also known as Kaartikeya, is the son of Lord Shiva. He is described as having six faces and twelve arms. When the army of the deities began the war to kill the asura named Taraka, a celestial voice proclaimed that victory could be possible only if Skanda was made army commander.

The earth is filled with several water bodies, ranging from tiny rain puddles to lakes that are visible from outer space. But the most expansive body of water is the ocean. Some estimates suggest that there is 1260 million trillion litres of water on planet earth. On average, the ocean is around 1 kilometer deep and can go to 11 kilometers in some places. The ocean sustains life on this earth and is home to thousands of species. This vast and awe-inspiring ocean is one of the most powerful expressions of Ishvara.

With this in mind, we should be able to see Ishvara in our teachers, in military prowess used for just means, and when we drink water.

purodhasaam : among the spiritual teachers
cha : and
mukhyam : foremost
maam : me
viddhi : know
paartha : O Paartha
brihaspatim : Brihaspati
senaaneenaam : among the military commanders
aham : I am
skandaha : Skanda
sarasaam : among water bodies
asmi : I am
saagaraha : the ocean

Bhagavad Gita Verse 25, Chapter 10

*maharsheenaam bhriguraham giraamasmyekamaksharam |
yajnyaanaam japayajnyosmi sthaavaraanaam himaalayaha || 25 ||*

Among the great sages I am Bhrigu, among spoken words I am the one letter (Om). Among the sacrificial rituals I am the ritual of japa, and among the immovable objects I am the Himalayas.

maharsheenaam : among the great sages
bhriguhu : Bhrigu
aham : I am
giraam : among spoken words
asmi : I am
ekam : the one
aksharam : letter
yajnyaanaam : among the sacrificial rituals
japayajnyaha : ritual of japa
asmi : I am
sthaavaraanaam : among the immovable objects
himaalayaha : Himalayas

Shri Krishna considers the great sage Bhrigu, the foremost among the great sages. as Ishvara's manifestation. Bhrigu is one of the seven sages or the Sapta Rishis that were willed into existence by Lord Brahma at the beginning of creation.

It is said that Bhrigu wanted to test who is the most patient among the holy trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Bhrigu tested Brahma and Shiva and was not pleased. When he went to visit Vishnu, Vishnu was taking a nap and did not notice Bhrigu enter. Angry with this, Bhrigu kicked Vishnu on the chest. Vishnu woke up from his nap and asked Bhrigu whether his foot was hurt, instead of getting angry at just been kicked. Bhrigu then decided that Vishnu was the most patient among the trinity.

Next, Shri Krishna says that among all the utterances or spoken words, the word Om, made up of just one letter, is the foremost. The entire Mandukya Upanishad describes the glory of the word Om in great detail, and uses Om as a method to achieve liberation.

In Indian culture, there are several rituals for appeasing various deities. Shri Krishna says that the act of chanting a mantra, also known as japa, is the foremost ritual possible. This is because most other rituals require wealth for procurement of materials, lot of time as well as knowledge of the right procedures and mantras. The ritual of japa is easy because it does not have such requirements. It can also be performed by someone who may not be physically fit or bedridden.

The Himalayas, the "abode of snow", is the highest and most massive mountain system in the world. It comprises a 2400 km span of land with peaks ranging as high as 8000 metres. Shri Krishna says that among the immobile objects in the world, the Himalayas are the most prominent manifestation of Ishvara.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 26, Chapter 10

*ashvattaha sarvavrikshaanaam devarsheenaam cha naaradaha |
gandharvaanaam chitrarathaha siddhaanaam kapilo munihi || 26 ||*

**Among the trees I am Ashvattha, among the divine sages I am Naarada.
Among the Gandharvas I am Chitraratha and among the Siddhas I
am sage Kapila.**

ashvattaha : Ashvattha
sarvavrikshaanaam : among the trees
devarsheenaam : among the divine
sages
cha : and
naaradaha : Naarada
gandharvaanaam : among the Gandhar-
vas
chitrarathaha : Chitraratha
siddhaanaam : among the Siddhas
kapilaha : Kapila
munihi : sage

Elaborating upon Ishvara's expressions, Shri Krishna says that the Aswattha tree is Ishvara's expression, as it is the foremost among trees. The Peepul tree, as it is more commonly known, is used to symbolically describe the human condition in the 15th chapter of the Gita. In India, women traditionally worship this tree for obtaining a good husband. In general, trees are given the status of saints in India. Like saints, trees always give back more to the world than they take.

We had already encountered Sage Naarada earlier in this chapter. Shri Krishna references Gandharvas next. Gandharvas are celestial beings who are accomplished singers, musicians and dancers. Among these, he considers Chitraratha foremost, and a manifestation of Ishvara. The word Chitraratha means one who has a wonderful chariot. In the Mahabhaarata, Chitraratha taught the fine arts to Arjuna, and advised the Paandavas to appoint a sage to guide them.

We now come to the notion of "siddhis". A siddhi is a superhuman power. Most people are drawn to sages who demonstrate superhuman powers. But just because someone has superhuman powers does not necessarily mean that he has achieved liberation. Sage Kapila was one of those rare individuals who not only had superhuman powers but also had achieved liberation. He is credited as the originator of the Saankhya school of philosophy. he also delivered a sermon to his mother which is known as the Kapila Gita.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 27, Chapter 10

*ucchaihshravasamashvaanaam viddhi maamamritodbhavam |
 airaavatam gajendraanaam naraanaam cha naraadhipam || 27 ||*

Among the horses, know me as Uchchaihshrava born of nectar. Among the elephants I am Airaavata, and among the humans I am the leader.

ucchaihshravasam : Uchchaihshrava
 ashvaanaam : among the horses
 viddhi : know
 maam : me
 amritodbhavam : born of nectar
 airaavatam : Airaavata
 gajendraanaam : among the elephants
 naraanaam : among the humans
 cha : and
 naraadhipam : the leader

We continue to learn about Ishvara's expressions in this shloka. The Puranaas describe the story of deities and demons churning the ocean for gaining the nectar of immortality. Before the nectar came out, several other divine entities emerged and Uchchaihshrava, the divine horse, was one of them. "Uchhai" means great and shravas means prosperity. Symbolically, Uchchaihshrava stands for the prosperity we attain when we put in focused effort and renounce our material desires. Shri Krishna says that among all the horses, the divine Uchchaihshrava is Ishvara's expression.

Airaavata is a four-tusked white elephant who is the mount of Indra, king of the deities. He is credited with showering rain. His mother is Iravati, grand daughter of sage Kashyapa. Given his status, Shri Krishna says that among all the elephants, Airaavata is Ishvara's expression.

Next, Shri Krishna turns to more familiar grounds by referencing humans. Among human beings, he says that Ishvara expresses in the leader. But this is not just any ordinary leader. Ishvara expresses himself in leaders whose accomplishments are a product of their hard work and effort, and whose leadership is in line with dharma or righteousness. It is easy to get name and fame by virtue of association or by performing unrighteous acts. This is not the leader that is referenced here.

So whenever we see the result of hard work, a humanitarian leader, or the cooling rain that parches a dry land, we should remember that all these are Ishvara's expressions.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 28, Chapter 10

*aayudhaanaamaham vajram dhenoonamasmi kaamadhuk |
prajanashchaasmi kandarpaha sarpaanaamasmi vaasukihi || 28 ||*

Among the weapons, I am Vajra and among cows I am Kaamadhenu. Among the creative powers I am Kandarpa and among the snakes I am Vaasuki.

aayudhaanaam : among the weapons
aham : I am
vajram : Vajra
dhenoonam : among cows
asmi : I am
kaamadhuk : Kaamadhenu
prajanaha : among the creative powers
cha : and
asmi : I am
kandarpaha : Kandarpa
sarpaanaam : among the snakes
asmi : I am
vaasukihi : Vaasuki

The Srimad Bhagavatam recounts the story of the demon Vritraasura who was created to kill all the deities. When their weapons were rendered powerless, they approached sage Dadhichi for help. Dadhichi, without any hesitation, offered to give his bones to the deities so that they could create Varja, the thunderbolt weapon of Lord Indra. Shri Krishna says that Ishvara is Vajra among the weapons, because it is powered by austerity and penance.

In the Puraanas, Kaamadhenu is a cow that has the ability to fulfill any desire that she is approached with. Even a normal cow has the ability to provide milk to a family in need, Symbolically, Kaamadhenu represents our mind because it can generate all kinds of thoughts, good or bad, out of thin air. Shri Krishna says that Ishvara expresses himself as Kaamadhenu.

Now, our mind has the ability to generate desires that prompt us to act. Kandarpa refers to Kaama deva, the lord of desire. Desires are the seed of creativity because without desire, there will be no creation. As we have seen so far, the Gita does not condemn desire as long as it falls within the purview of dharma or righteousness. So then, Ishvara manifests through those desires that are in line with dharma or righteousness.

Vaasuki is the king of snakes and is seen coiled around the neck of Lord Shiva. He symbolizes our ego or ahankaara, our sense of "I". If we are able to tame our ego, then it becomes an ornament, as in the case of Lord Shiva. If we cannot tame it, it becomes dangerous and can strike us when we least expect it, by causing strong feeling of superiority or inferiority as an example. So Shri Krishna says that Vaasuki is Ishvara's expression among all the snakes.

So whenever we see someone devote their life towards a selfless cause, when our mind generates positive thoughts, when our desires are right-

teous and our ego is in check, we should realize that all this is Ishvara's expression.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 29, Chapter 10

*anantashchaasmi naagaanaam varuno yaadasaamaham |
pitrunaamaryamaa chaasmi yamaha samyataamaham || 29 ||*

Among the water snakes I am Ananta and among the marine beings I am Varuna. Among the Pitrs I am Aryamaa and among the controllers I am Yama.

anantaha : Ananta
cha : and
asmi : I am
naagaanaam : among the water snakes
varunaha : Varuna
yaadasaam : marine beings
aham : I am
pitrunaam : among the Pitrs
aryamaa : Aryamaa
cha : and
asmi : I am
yamaha : Yama
samyataamaham : among the controllers

In the previous shloka, Shri Krishna spoke about Ishvara's expressions among snakes that live on land. Here, he says that among the snakes that live in water, Ishvara's foremost expressions is Ananta. Also known as Aadishesha, he is depicted with a thousand heads, each head singing the glory of Lord Vishnu, who rests on Aadishesha's coils. His name comes from the Sanskrit root "sis" meaning "that which remains", because Aadishesha remains unaffected after the dissolution of the universe.

Next, we encounter the world of marine dwelling beings or "Yaadas". Among these, Shri Krishna says that Ishvara is Lord Varuna, the king of the ocean. He is mentioned as part of the daily prayer ritual known as Sandhyavandanam. Symbolically, "yaadas" refers to divinity prevalent in any seemingly inert object. Recognizing the divinity in everything, the Indian tradition encourages worship of the Tulsi leaf, of trees, of the earth and so on.

Pitra loka is the realm of the manes or ancestor gods. The seven primary manes are Kavyavaha, Anala, Soma, Yama, Aryama, Agnisvatta and Barhisat. Among these, Shri Krishna says that Ishvara is Aryaman, the chief of the manes. Ishvara is also Lord Yama among all the controllers. This is because he is also the lord of justice, using the ultimate punishment of death to maintain order and harmony in the universe.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 30, Chapter 10

*prahlaadashchaasmi daityaanaam kaalaha kalayataamaham |
mrigaanaam cha mrigendroham vainateyascha pakshinaam || 30 ||*

Among the demons I am Prahalaad and among the systems of counting I am time. Among animals I am the lion and among the birds I am Vainateya.

The story of Prahalaad is found in the Srimad Bhaagavatam. Son of the demon-king Hiranyakashipu, he was an ardent devotee of Lord Naaraayana. So firm was his devotion that Lord Naaraayana appeared in the form of the half lion half man Narasimha to save Prahalaad from the atrocities committed by his father. Praising the strength of devotion, Shri Krishna says that Ishvara is found in Prahalaad among demons. Also, it drives home the message that we can change our destiny no matter what kind of family we are born into.

Next, Shri Krishna takes up the systems of counting. Even today there are various forms of such systems including the metric system, the imperial system and so on. The most accurate system, however, is that of time. Everything and everyone in the universe is under the influence of time and cannot escape its impact. So among the counting systems, Ishvara's foremost expression is that of time.

For those of us who have seen a lion up close, it is no surprise that Shri Krishna finds the lion as prominent among the animals. The king of the jungle is magnificent even if found in a cage. His roar subdues animals that are much larger than he is. Among the birds, it is Vainateya, also known as Garuda the eagle, who is Ishvara's finest expression. Garuda was the son of sage Kashyapa and Vinata. He is Lord Vishnu's mount, emanating the Vedas from his wings as he flies.

So whenever we see someone succeeding despite their weaknesses, when we observe the passage of time, whenever we see animals or birds, we should remember that everything is Ishvara only.

prahlaadaha : Prahalaad
cha : and
asmi : I am
daityaanaam : among the demons
kaalaha : time
kalayataam : among the systems of
counting
aham : I am
mrigaanaam : among the animals
cha : and
mrigendraha : lion
aham : I am
vainateyaha : Vainateya
cha : and
pakshinaam : among the birds

Bhagavad Gita Verse 31, Chapter 10

*pavanaha pavataamasmi raamaha shashtrabhritaamaham |
jhashaanaam makarashachaasmi strotasaamasmi jaahnavee || 31 ||*

**Among the purifiers I am the wind and among the weapon wielders
I am Raama. Among the sea creatures I am the crocodile and among
the rivers I am Gangaa.**

pavanaha : wind
pavataam : among the purifiers
asmi : I am
raamaha : Raama
shashtrabhritaam : among the weapon
wielders
aham : I am
jhashaanaam : sea creatures
makaraha : crocodile
cha : and
asmi : I am
strotasaam : among the rivers
asmi : I am
jaahnavee : Gangaa

Shri Krishna begins this shloka with the topic of purification. He says that wind is the foremost expression of Ishvara among all of the purifiers in the world. We know this from experience. Deep inhalation and exhalation removes several toxins from the body. If a room has been locked for a long time, the first thing we do is to open the window.

Lord Raama is also known as "Kodanda Paani", the wielder of weapons. Among all of the weapon wielders in the world, Lord Raama is the foremost. This is because although he was adept at wielding several types of weapons, he only used them as a last resort when no other methods of diplomacy worked. In the Raamayana, we can see numerous instances when he killed Rakshasaas after they did not heed his warning.

Now, just like we saw power and majesty in the Lion, we see power and majesty in the giant whale and the crocodile. "Makara" refers either to crocodile or the giant whale. Both of these are powerful sea creatures. Shri Krishna says that among the sea creatures, Ishvara's foremost expression is the Makara.

Among the rivers, Ishvara is Jaahnavi or Gangaa. Jaahnavi refers to the daughter of sage Jahnu. It is said that the Gangaa's turbulent waters disturbed the meditation of sage Jahnu. Angered, he drank her, and only released her when the gods prayed to him. Furthermore, knowledge, just like the river Gangaa, flows from a higher plane to a lower plane, and is perennial. Also, knowledge purifies, just like a river purifies.

So whenever we feel the wind, when we see weapons used justly, when we behold the giant whale or the mighty river, we should know that all these are Ishvara's manifestations.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 32, Chapter 10

*sargaanaamaadirantashcha madhyam chaivaahamarjuna |
adhyaatmavidyaa vidyaanaam vaadaha pravadataamaham || 32 ||*

Among the creations, I only am the beginning, end and middle, O Arjuna. Among the sciences I am spiritual science and among the debates I am Vaada.

sargaanaam : among the creations
aadihi : beginning
antaha : end
cha : and
madhyam : middle
cha : and
eva : only
aham : I am
arjuna : O Arjuna
adhyaatmavidyaa : spiritual science
vidyaanaam : among the sciences
vaadaha : Vaada
pravadataam : among the debates
aham : I am

To ensure that we do not get carried away by getting stuck in specific manifestations of Ishvara, Shri Krishna addresses Arjuna and reiterates that Ishvara is in everything and at all times. As Brahma, he creates the universe, as Vishnu he sustains the universe and as Shiva, he dissolves the universe. But Ishvara is ever present, he does not go away during any of these activities.

Next, Shri Krishna takes up the subject of knowledge. For most of us, knowledge refers either to academic knowledge, career-enhancing knowledge or knowledge about something we enjoy doing such as arts or literature. Although such knowledge has its place in our life, it is secondary or lower knowledge. It is "aparaa vidyaa".

Why is it secondary? Such knowledge keeps us engaged in the material world, in Prakriti or in Maaya. We tend to correct, change and rearrange our life situations, but none of these yield lasting happiness. We do not look to correcting the real problem, which is our understanding of our own self. Only spiritual knowledge, knowledge of our own self, has the power to take us out of the material world and towards Ishvara. This is why Shri Krishna praises "adhyaatma vidyaa", spiritual knowledge among all types of knowledge.

We now come to the topic of debates. In all spheres of life, a conversation between two people where one is trying to influence other is extremely important. In the US, debates between two presidential candidates can make or break their chances of winning. In general, there are three kinds of debates.

In "Jalpa", the speaker wants to prove his point and bring down his opponent, no matter how sound or logical the opponent's argument. In "Vitanda", the speaker does not have any point to make, he just wants to bring down his opponent. Only in "Vaada" do both speakers listen to each other and push each other to ensure that the most log-

ical argument prevails, not that one or the other speaker wins. Shri Krishna says that such a debate that places logic above ego is Ishvara's foremost expression.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 33, Chapter 10

*aksharaanaamakaarosmi dvandvaha saamasikasya cha |
ahamevaakshyaha kaalo dhaataaham vishvatomukham || 33 ||*

Among the alphabets I am "A" and among grammatical compounds I am Dvandva. I only am the inexhaustible time. I am the provider facing all directions.

aksharaanaam : among the alphabets
asmi : I am
dvandvaha : Dvandva
saamasikasya : among grammatical
compounds
cha : and
aham : I am
eva : only
akshyaha : inexhaustible
kaalaha : time
dhaataaham : provider
vishvatomukhaha : facing all directions

The word "akshara" means letter, but also means imperishable. Shri Krishna says that among the aksharas, the imperishable letters, Ishvara is manifested foremost in the letter "a". No letter can be pronounced without the support of "a". For example, the consonant "k" cannot be pronounced without adding an "a" to make it "ka". It is said that each letter has a presiding deity, and Lord Brahma is the presiding deity of "a". Given its importance, it is Ishvara's manifestation.

Next, we delve into Sanskrit grammar. It has four types of compounds called avyavi, tatpurusha, bahuvreehee and dvandva. A compound joins two words. The dvandva compound gives equal importance to both words that are joined. For example: Raamalakshmanau is a dvandva compound. The other three compounds assign different levels of importance to the words that are joined. Since Dvandva, like Ishvara, maintains sameness between two objects, it is the foremost expression of Ishvara.

Previously, time was mentioned as the ultimate counter. Here, time is taken up in its infinite nature. It is that infinite time, "kaala", which is prevalent before, during and after the creation of the universe. Ishvara, as the manifestation of infinite time, is the controller of Prakriti who is the provider of fruits of everyone's action. His omnipresence and omniscience, indicated by the phrase "facing all directions", ensures that everyone gets exactly what they deserve.

So whenever we read literature in both prose and poetry form, or when we contemplate the results of our actions, we should always realize that it is Ishvara working through all of them.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 34, Chapter 10

*mrityuhu sarvaharashchaahamudbhavashcha bhavishyataam |
keertihi shreeravaakcha naareenaam smritirmedhaa dhritihi kshamaa || 34 ||*

I am death, destroyer of all. I am what emerges in the future. Among women I am fame, wealth, speech, memory, retention, fortitude and forgiveness.

We continue our journey through the manifestations of Ishvara. In order to remind us of the ephemeral nature of life, Shri Krishna says that among those forces that destroy things, Ishvara is death, the ultimate destroyer. Death is closely intertwined with time since everything is destroyed in the course of time.

In the Puranaas, Lord Shiva commences the act of dissolution by performing a dance called "taandava nritya", his drum called "damru" in hand. After dissolution is complete, Ishvara then emerges as the creative principle to begin the next round of creation. Ishvara is the "stuff" of the universe, as well as the energy pervading it.

So far, we have come across several manifestations of Ishvara. At times, we may find hard to connect some of these manifestations because we are not familiar with them. Shri Krishna is careful to not alienate us. He now provides a list of qualities that we see in ourselves and in others every day.

These qualities are : keerti (name and fame on account of performing virtuous deeds), shree (beauty and wealth), vaak (refined speech), smriti (memory of events), medhaa (ability to retain information that was read), dhriti (fortitude in the face of exhaustion) and kshama (forgiveness in the face of sorrow). In Sanskrit grammar these words are feminine nouns. Shri Krishna says that Ishvara manifests himself as one or all of these qualities in people.

mrityuhu : death
sarvaharaha : destroyer of all
cha : and
aham : I am
udbhavaha : emerges
cha : and
bhavishyataam : future
keertihi : fame
shreehi : wealth
vaak : speech
cha : and
naareenaam : among women
smritihi : memory
medhaa : retention
dhritihi : fortitude
kshamaa : forgiveness

Bhagavad Gita Verse 35, Chapter 10

*brihatsaama tathaa saamnaa gaayatraya chandasaamaham |
maasaanaam margasheershamritonaam kusumaakaraha || 35 ||*

Among the Saamas I am Brihat-saama, also, among the poetic metres I am Gaayatri. Among the months I am Maargasheersha, and among the seasons I am spring.

brihatsaama : Brihat-saama
tathaa : also
saamnaa : among the Saamas
gaayatraya : Gaayatri
chandasaam : among the lyrical metres
aham : I am
maasaanaam : among the months
margasheersham : Maargasheersha
aham : I am
ritonaam : among the seasons
kusumaakaraha : spring

Previously, we came across the Saama Veda as one of Ishvara's manifestations. Within the Saama Veda, there is a chant called the Brihat-Saama mantra, an invocation that is sung for praising Lord Indra. Since it is Brihat, the most potent and powerful among the Saama Veda mantras, Shri Krishna terms it as a foremost expression of Ishvara.

In prior chapters of the, we have seen the use of the poetic metre as a tool to emphasize the change in topic. Let us delve deeper into this. The Gita is composed in the "Anushtup chandas". Chandas means metre. It is made up of 4 lines or padas, each comprising 8 syllables. For example, let us see a famous shloka: "ya-da-ya-da-hi-dharm-as-ya". It contains 8 syllables. There are 3 more lines like this. So we get 8 times 4 equals 32 syllables.

The Gaayatri mantra is considered to be the root and essence of all Vedic mantras. It is composed in a metre of the same name. The Gaayatri metre is made up of 4 lines each comprising 6 syllables. The first line is "tat-sa-vi-tur-vareniyam". Therefore the Gaayatri mantra as well as the associated metre, foremost among all the mantras, are Ishvara's expression.

Next, Shri Krishna elaborates upon weather and seasons. He says that among all the months, Ishvara is the month of Maargasheersha of the Indian calendar. It corresponds to the November-December time period and culminates in the festival of Makara Sankranti. He then goes on to say that among the seasons, Ishvara is Kusumaakara, which refers to spring, the flower-bearing season. Both Margasheersha and Kusumaakara are not too hot and not too cold. They are conducive to generating serenity in the mind, and that is why they are considered foremost expressions of Ishvara.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 36, Chapter 10

*dyootam chalayataamasmi tejastejasvinaamaham |
jayosmi vyavasaayosmi sattvam sattvavataamaham || 36 ||*

Among deceitful pursuits, I am gambling. I am the splendour in the brilliant and I am victory and determination. I am the Sattva of Saatvic individuals.

dyootam : gambling
chalayataam : among the deceitful
asmi : I am
tejaha : splendour
tejasvinaam : brilliant
aham : I am
jayaha : victory
asmi : I am
vyavasaayaha : determination
asmi : I am
sattvam : Sattva
sattvavataamaham : Saatvic individuals

As we have seen throughout the Gita, Ishvara uses the power of his maaya to create this universe of duality. So if everything that we consider "good" is Ishvara, its polar opposite is also Ishvara. To underscore this point, Shri Krishna brings forward gambling as Ishvara's manifestation.

Most of us are under the sway of maaya. If we let maaya have her way, she can steal our faculty of discrimination, our intellect that can distinguish right from wrong. Of all the possible ways of deluding and deceiving us, gambling is the strongest form of maaya. Like any addiction, it can cause great attachment and ultimately result in great sorrow. In the Srimad Bhaagavatam, the demon Kali was asked to reside wherever there is gambling.

Conversely, there are those among us who are endowed with a sharp intellect, one that never loses its power of discrimination. Nobel prize winners, freedom fighters, scientists, the list goes on. Shri Krishna says that it is Ishvara who is shining as the brilliance of such luminaries. Whenever we come across such individuals, we may feel inferior against their prowess. But there is no need to do so, because it is Ishvara that is giving them their brilliance.

Even if most of us are not endowed with such intellectual faculties, we can accomplish great things if we are hardworking, industrious and focused. People with very little mental and financial resources, through blood, sweat and tears, have shown that it is possible to succeed in spite of their limitations. Shri Krishna says that Ishvara manifests as their hard work, and also as the victory that comes as a result of this effort.

Sattva, along with rajas and tamas, comprise the three basic building blocks of maaya or prakriti. When any system is working in perfect harmony, without any fluctuations or disturbances, we can say that

the Sattva quality has manifested. So when our intellect is functioning without any agitations, when we see things clearly, it indicates that sattva has dominated over rajas and tamas. Ishvara manifests as this sattva in people who demonstrate virtues such as modesty, calmness, sobriety and goodness.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 37, Chapter 10

vrishneenaam vaasudevosmi paandavaanaam dhananjaya |
muneenaamapyaham vyaasaha kaveenaamushanaa kavihi || 37 ||

Among the Vrishnis, I am Vaasudeva and among the Paandavas, I am Dhananjaya. Also, among the sages I am Vyaasa and among the seers I am Ushanaa the seer.

vrishneenaam : among the Vrishnis
 vaasudevaha : Vaasudeva
 asmi : I am
 paandavaanaam : among the Paandavas
 dhananjaya : I am Dhananjaya
 muneenaam : among the sages
 api : also
 aham : I am
 vyaasaha : Vyaasa
 kaveenaam : among the seers
 ushanaa : Ushanaa
 kavihi : the seer

One of the many names of Shri Krishna is Vaarshaneya, which means one who is born in the clan of Vrishni. The Vrishnis are said to have descended from king Yadu who started the major branch of the Chandravanshis, the lunar dynasty. Being the most prominent of the Vrishni clan, Shri Krishna declares himself as Ishvara's manifestation.

The Bhagavad Gita could never have been possible without Arjuna asking the questions, and without Sage Vyaasa writing the Mahaabhaarata epic. In that regard, Shri Krishna declares both of them as Ishvara's divine manifestations. Furthermore, both Arjuna and Vyaasa were prominent in their own right. Arjuna was the only undefeated warrior in the Mahaabhaarata war, and also the greatest archer of his time. Sage Vyaasa is credited with having divided the Vedas into four branches, and also with writing the major Puraanaas and the Brahma Sutra.

The word "Kavi" means one who is a visionary, one who can foresee what is coming due to the mastery of his academic prowess. Ushana, also known as Shukraachaarya, is revered in the Indian tradition as one of the foremost gurus or teachers. He learnt the technique of reviving the dead from Lord Shiva, also known as Sanjeevani vidya. He later became the guru of the asuraas or demons, but never inherited any of their traits. Shukra-vaar, the day of his birth, is the name used for Friday in India. Shri Krishna declares Shukraachaarya as Ishvara's expression.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 38, Chapter 10

*dando damayataamasmi neetirasmi jigeeshataam |
maunam chaivaasmi guhyaanaam jnyaanam jnyaanavataamaham || 38 ||*

Among means of subjugation, I am punishment and among seekers of victory, I am strategy. Also, among the secrets I am silence and among the wise, I am knowledge.

In this shloka, Shri Krishna declares punishment as foremost among Ishvara's expressions that restrain or subdue others. As we have seen in the second chapter, dwelling on sense objects can very easily lead to loss of even a wise person's wisdom and discrimination, which may result in unlawful behaviour. A society without methods to punish criminals is impractical, and will result in anarchy and chaos. From our standpoint, we need to watch our mind and our sense organs constantly, lest they lead us astray.

Next, we look at neeti or strategy. In the Mahabhaarata, Arjuna needed to finish Jayadratha in order to move closer to a victory. But the powerful Jayadratha had obtained a boon from his father. Whoever caused Jayadratha's head to fall to the ground, their head would split into a hundred pieces. This was a tough situation and needed a smart solution.

Upon Shri Krishna's advice, Arjuna dispatched an arrow that would sever Jayadratha's head and deposited it into the lap of his father. When Jayadratha's father got up, he dropped the head and became the target of his own curse. Shri Krishna, the ultimate strategist, declares strategy as Ishvara's foremost expression among seekers of victory. Strategy enables us to deal with different people and circumstances, and to devise a plan to win every time.

"Silence is golden" is a proverb that has stood the test of time. In a business negotiation, we may be put in situations where others try to insult us in some way. We face a choice in such situations: we can either snap back at that person or we can stay silent. If we respond, we may say something that may come back to haunt us later. Worse still, we could reveal a secret that puts us in jeopardy.

To that end, Shri Krishna advises us to follow the "silence is golden" proverb by declaring silence as Ishvara's foremost manifestation among

dandaha : punishment
damayataam : among means of subjugation
asmi : I am
neetihi : strategy
asmi : I am
jigeeshataam : among seekers of victory
maunam : silence
cha : and
eva : also
asmi : I am
guhyaanaam : among the secrets
jnyaanam : knowledge
jnyaanavataam : among the wise
aham : I am

secrets. And those wise people who follow Ishvara's recommendations also receive their wisdom through Ishvara's as his divine manifestation.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 39, Chapter 10

*yatchaapi sarvabhootaanaam beejam tadahamarjuna |
na tadasti vinaa yatsyaanmayaa bhootam charaacharam || 39 ||*

And O Arjuna, whatsoever is the seed of all beings, I am that. No moving or non-moving being can exist without me.

Now Shri Krishna begins to conclude the teaching of this chapter. Having provided a long list of Ishvara's divine expressions, he now gives us a simple formula to recognize him. He says that whatever we come across in the world, whether it is a living or a non-living entity, or whether it is moving or stationary, it has arisen from the seed that is Ishvara. In other words, Ishvara is the cause or the seed of everything in this universe.

One way of understanding this is as follows. When we refer to an object, let's say it's a book, we say : "This is a book". There are two aspects pointed out here. First is the book, which is quite obvious. But we also use the word "is" to indicate that the book exists, that the book is visible, and it will be visible to someone else. Shri Krishna says that the very existence of the book, the "is-ness" of the book, is nothing but Ishvara.

In other words, this entire universe will not exist without Ishvara. All of the names and forms in the universe use Ishvara as their basis. If we comprehend this, and develop our vision based on this knowledge, we will automatically see Ishvara everywhere, just like we automatically "see" electricity in every electrical gadget.

yat : whatsoever
cha : and
api : also
sarvabhootaanaam : all beings
beejam : seed
tat : that
aham : I am
arjuna : Arjuna
na : it is not
tat : that
asti : there is
vinaa : without
yat : which
syaat : can exist
mayaa : me
bhootam : being
chara : moving
acharam : non-moving

Bhagavad Gita Verse 40, Chapter 10

*aantosti mama divyaanaam vibhooteenaam parantapa |
esha toodyeshataha prokto vibhootervistaro mayaa || 40 ||*

There is no end to my divine expressions, O scorcher of foes. For, what has been spoken of my expressions is (just) an indicator.

Shri Krishna, speaking as Ishvara, began enumerating his divine expressions in the beginning of this chapter. As we have seen so far, he has highlighted the most glorious, powerful and awe-inspiring aspects of his creation. In this shloka, he admits that it is next to impossible to list every single aspect of creation. But he also asserts that every single aspect of creation is divine, since it has sprung out of Ishvara himself.

So if everything is divine, why should we seek only a subset of Ishvara's creations? It is to help us move towards liberation. We tend to be drawn towards people or objects in that universe that naturally attract our senses. If we look at them as mere people or objects, we get bound to them through attachment, which will eventually result in sorrow when we get separated from them. But if we look at them as manifestations of Ishvara, we are automatically protected from further entangling ourselves in samsara, in the desire-oriented world.

Let us go back to the example of Mr. X and his shiny new car. The seed of sorrow was planted the minute he started considering that "the car is mine". Instead, if Mr. X thinks that the car is Ishvara's creation, he will immediately drop his sense of "mine-ness" from it. Furthermore, he realizes that the car is a temporary object and will eventually cease to exist. He also comes to know that the sense of joy he derives from buying a new car is not from the car, but it is from the presence of Ishvara inside it. So if something happens to the car, he remains unaffected and unperturbed.

Now having gone through the list, we find that a 21st century person like us has difficulty identifying with Puraanic glories that would have been familiar to Arjuna. How should we deal with this issue? Shri Krishna gives the answer in the next shloka.

na : no
antaha : end
asti : there is
mama : my
divyaanaam : of divine
vibhooteenaam : expressions
parantapa : O scorcher of foes
eshaha : this
tu : for
udyeshataha : indicator
proktaha : has been spoken
vibhootehe : of the expressions
vistaraha : explanations
mayaa : my

Bhagavad Gita Verse 41, Chapter 10

*yadyadvibhootimatsatvam shreemadoorjitameva vaa |
tattadevaavagaccha tvam mama tejonshasambhavam || 41 ||*

Whichever entity is endowed with majesty, prosperity and also energy, you should understand that all those as born out of a fraction of my power.

Since it is difficult for someone in our time to identify with Puraanic expressions of Ishvara, Shri Krishna gives us a simple suggestion. He says that anything that appeals to our mind and senses, any object or person that is endowed with grandeur, perfection, knowledge and power, anything that inspire awe and wonder is Ishvara's expression. So we are free to choose anything that meets this criteria.

So if we live in India, the Taj Mahal becomes Ishvara's expression and in USA, the Grand Canyon. If we like western classical music, the Mahler Symphony No. 9 in D Major becomes Ishvara's vibhooti and if we like Indian classical music, a rendition by Bhimsen Joshi. An engineer can admire marvels such as the tallest building in the world or the space shuttle. And all of us can admire the thousands of nameless people who are working in NGOs to better the world as yet another expression of Ishvara.

Now, Shri Krishna makes another important point here. If we add up all the glories in the universe, that glory is but a fraction of Ishvara's glory. Just like we always think of a country's government whenever we see a police officer, we should always think of Ishvara whenever we see or think of any of his expressions. Arjuna had asked the question as to how he could know Ishvara. With this shloka, Shri Krishna has provided the answer. We use the visible expression to remind us of the invisible Ishvara.

What should we do? Whenever we see something wonderful and glorious, we should remember that the glory is coming from Ishvara, not from that object or person. Next, we should remember that Ishvara is infinitely more powerful and glorious than the object or person. In this manner, we will be able to maintain a constant awareness of Ishvara.

yat : whichever
vibhootimat : endowed with majesty
satvam : entity
shreemat : prosperity
oorjitam : energy
eva : also
vaa : and
tat : all those
eva : and
avagaccha : understand
tvam : you
mama : my
tejaha : power
ansha : fraction
sambhavam : born out of

Bhagavad Gita Verse 42, Chapter 10

*athavaa bahunaitena kim jnyaatena tavaarjuna |
vishtabhyaahamidam kritsnamekaanshena sthito jagata || 42 ||*

**Now, what (is the need) for you to know these details, O Arjuna?
With a fraction (of myself), sustaining this entire universe, I am es-
tablished.**

athavaa : now
bahunaa : details
etena : these
kim : what
jnyaatena : to know
tava : for you
arjuna : O Arjuna
vishtabhya : sustaining
aham : I
idam : this
kritsnam : entire
ekaanshena : with a fraction
sthitaha : established
jagata : universe

In the days when we would stay employed with the same firm for a majority of their career, we would start with an entry level job as a junior accountant, let us say, and work our way up the corporate ladder. Over a period of fifteen or twenty years, that junior accountant could end up being promoted to chief financial officer. At that point, he would no longer be concerned with trivial details such as checking receipts against journal entries and so on. He would focus on bigger issues such as the financial health of the entire company.

Similarly, when Shri Krishna provided a long list of Ishvara's expressions, he wanted to ensure that Arjuna did not get stuck at the level of knowing more and more expressions. He wanted Arjuna to stop asking more questions, take a step back and ask himself a very basic question.

If Ishvara is present in everything in the universe, and Ishvara is also present in me, is there anything else in the universe besides Ishvara? In other words, if Ishvara is in everything, isn't everything in Ishvara ultimately? It is like asking: If there is space in everything including me and including every atom, isn't everything in space?

With this intriguing thought, Shri Krishna concludes the tenth chapter and sets the stage for the eleventh chapter. While the tenth chapter was about how the one Ishvara was in all, the eleventh chapter is about how all is in the one Ishvara.

*om tatsatiti shreematbhagavatgitasupanishadsu brahmavidyaayaam yo-
gashaastre shreekrishnaarjunsamvade vibhootiyogo naama dashamodhyaayaha
|| 10 ||*

Summary of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 10

When India received independence, the founders wanted to ensure that the newly-created states within India did not disintegrate due to infighting. To that end, they created a two tier government system with a state government that was aligned to state interests, and a central government that put the interests of India before anything else.

Furthermore, in order to ensure that residents of a state did not forget that they are part of a bigger country, our founders instituted the national flag, the national anthem, independence day, republic day, the national emblem and so on. These symbols are expressions, or "vibhootis" of India. They are highly important because they remind us of the existence of the nation of India no matter where we are. They make the abstract concept of the nation of India tangible and visible.

Shri Krishna ended the previous chapter by urging Arjuna, and all devotees, to always keep their minds within Ishvara. In this chapter, Arjuna asked Shri Krishna, "how can I know Ishvara when my eyes cannot see him?" The answer to Arjuna's question is the main teaching of this chapter, in the form of natural, historic, Puraanic and other awe-inspiring people and objects that serve as Ishvara's expressions or manifestations.

How do these expressions benefit us? Just like we use symbols of India to constantly invoke the notion of India, we should use one or some or all of these expressions to constantly remember and think of Ishvara. This chapter is not meant to be a lesson in the Puraanas. It is meant to be practiced as a daily meditation, by employing one expression, whichever we like, as the object of our meditation.

So for example, if we have an affinity for the sun, we should bring the shloka "aadityaanaamaham vishnuhu" to attention and keep it in our minds as much as possible, whenever we see the sun. This will transform our vision to look beyond the visible aspect of the sun, connect the sun to Ishvara and see the Ishvara inside.



Vishwaroopa Darshana Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 11**Arjuna uvaacha:**madanugrhaaya paramam guhyamadhyaatmasangitam |
yattvayoktam vachastena mohoyam vigato mama || 1 ||*

madanugrhaaya : out of compassion for me
 paramam : supreme
 guhyam : secret
 adhyaatma : knowledge of the self
 sangitam : known as
 yat : that
 tvayaa : you have
 uktam : spoken
 vachaha : statements
 tena : by those
 mohaha : delusion
 ayam : this
 vigataha : destroyed
 mama : my

Arjuna said: Out of compassion for me, you have spoken about the supreme secret known as the knowledge of the self. By those statements, my delusion has been destroyed.

We begin the eleventh chapter with Arjuna's words. He recalls the root cause of his panic attack from the first chapter which is moha or delusion which caused confusion between his duty as a warrior and as a family member. He now says that his delusion has been dispelled. How did that happen? It is only because Shri Krishna revealed the knowledge of the self, Adhyaatma vidyaa, to Arjuna, the answer to the question "who am I?"

When Arjuna understood his true nature as the self, the aatmaa, the eternal essence, he came to know that the self does not kill or be killed, it is neither the doer of action or the enjoyer of the results. He then realized that even if his body died, or his body killed another body, nothing would happen to the eternal essence in each of those bodies. Given the power of this knowledge to destroy the biggest delusion about who he was, he terms it "paramam" or supreme. And since it requires a sincere student and a rare teacher, he terms it "guhyam" or secret.

Now, we may think that there was something special in Arjuna that qualified him to receive this supreme knowledge. Arjuna was humble enough to acknowledge that it was purely out of compassion that Shri Krishna showered his grace upon him and gave him this knowledge. Only through the grace and compassion of Ishvara and a qualified guru can one receive this knowledge.

Another aspect of the teaching was Ishvara's involvement with the universe. Arjuna highlights it in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 11

*bhavaapyayau hi bhootaanaam shrutau vistarasho mayaa |
tvattaha kamalapatraaksha maahaatmyamapi chaavyayam || 2 ||*

For, I have heard about the creation and dissolution of all beings, elaborately, from you O lotus-eyed one, and also about your imperishable glory.

bhavaapyayau : creation and dissolution
hi : for
bhootaanaam : all beings
shrutau : have heard
vistarashaha : elaborately
mayaa : I have
tvattaha : from you
kamalapatraaksha : O lotus-eyed
maahaatmyam : glory
api : also
cha : and
avyayam : imperishable

Arjuna, ever the good student, uses this shloka to summarize Shri Krishna's teaching. He acknowledges that he has understood the essence of the teaching, which asserts Ishvara as the creator, maintainer and dissolution of the entire universe. In other words, there is no other cause of the universe besides Ishvara. He is both the raw material and the intelligence behind the universe. This "maahaatmyam" or glory was further reinforced in Arjuna's mind by hearing the divine expressions of Ishvara from Shri Krishna.

However, by addressing Shri Krishna as "lotus-eyed", Arjuna also reveals his understanding of another aspect of Ishvara. Like the lotus that does not get affected by the attributes of its pond, Ishvara does not get personally involved in the workings of the universe. He is impartial to everyone in the granting of results, liberation and bondage. He remains as the "avyayam" or imperishable foundation upon which the mechanical Prakriti projects the multitude of names and forms.

Now, there is a hint of dissatisfaction expressed by Arjuna in this shloka. Even though he has understood the teaching from Ishvara himself, resolved his doubts, and also learnt the techniques of karma yoga and dhyana yoga or meditation, he needs one more thing. What is that? He divulges it in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 11

*evametadyathaatha tvamaatmaanam parameshavara |
 drishtumichchaami te roopamaishvaram purushottamam || 3 ||*

**As you have spoken about yourself, so is it, O supreme Ishvara.
 I wish to see your divine form, O supreme person.**

evam : it is that
 etat : this
 yathaa : as
 aattha : spoken
 tvam : you
 atmaanam : yourself
 parameshavara : supreme Ishvara
 drishtum : to see
 ichchaami : I wish
 te : your
 roopam : form
 aishvaram : divine
 purushottamam : O supreme person

When someone describes the plot and special effects of the latest Hollywood summer blockbuster to us, and our curiosity and interest for that movie increases, we reach a point when we say "I want to see that movie right now, and I want to see it on a large IMAX screen". Why does that happen? Of the five sense organs, the organ of sight is the dearest to us. As they say, "a picture is worth a thousand words".

Similarly, Arjuna's curiosity towards Shri Krishna had reached its peak at this point. That is why he asked Shri Krishna, who was the "avatar" or incarnation of Ishvara, to reveal his divine form that was described in the last shloka of the previous chapter. How magnificent would that form be, if this entire universe was sustained by only a fraction of Ishvara, and if all of the divine expressions were contained in Ishvara. In addition to the might and grandeur of this form, Arjuna also wanted to see how everything originated, existed and dissolved within Ishvara, and finally, how everything was Ishvara in essence.

We call something divine when it is endowed with the attributes of knowledge, lordship, power, prowess and brilliance. Arjuna put in a request to Shri Krishna to see that that form, where it is possible to have this vision of many in one. However, the sincere Arjuna did not order to command Shri Krishna to show that form. He qualified his request with a great deal of humility, which we see in the upcoming shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 11

*manyase yadi tachchakayam mayaa drishtumiti prabho |
yogeshvara tato me tvam darshayaatmaanamavyayam || 4 ||*

**O Lord, if you think that it is possible for this to be seen by me,
then O Yogeshvara, you show me your undivided form.**

manyase : you think
yadi : if
tat : that
shakayam : possible
mayaa : by me
drishtum : seen
iti : this
prabho : O Lord
yogeshvara : O Yogeshvara
tataha : then
me : me
tvam : you
darshaya : show
aatmaanam : your
avyayam : undivided form

We come across another aspect of Arjuna's request in this shloka. Imagine the plight of an movie actor who is absolutely devoted to his craft. He has worked day and nights for a whole year in a movie as a supporting actor. After the shooting ends, he is filled with a burning desire to see the entire movie. Why so? It is because he has only seen the bits and pieces of the movie that he was involved with, and he is not satisfied unless he sees it as a single story, end to end.

Likewise, Arjuna is no longer content with seeing bits and pieces of Ishvara's expressions. He wants to see how it all comes together as one undivided entity. This is indicated by Arjuna's use of the word "avyayam" which means undivided, without any discontinuity. And like the only person who can reveal the whole movie is the director, the only person that can reveal the undivided nature of the universe is the "prabhu", the governor, master and controller.

Now, Arjuna knows that he has to approach Shri Krishna with humility. That's why he politely says: "show me that form only if you think that I am qualified to see it". Moreover, Arjuna does not want to imagine it or dream it up, he wants to see it with his eyes, with his "drishti". He also refers to Shri Krishna as "yogeshwara", the teacher of several yogas in the Gita such as karma yoga, dhyana yoga, jnyana yoga and bhakti yoga. The yoga in "Vibhooti yoga" is the power that creates variety in the one undivided Ishvara.

So, does Shri Krishna agree to this request? We shall see next.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 11**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**pashya me paartha roopaani shatashotha sahastrashaha |
naanaavidhaani divyaani naanaavarnaakriteeni cha || 5 ||*

pashya : behold
 me : my
 paartha : O Paartha
 roopaani : forms
 shatashotha : hundreds
 sahastrashaha : thousands
 naanavidhaani : myriad kinds
 divyaani : divine
 naana : various
 varna : colours
 akriteeni : shapes
 cha : and

Shree Bhagavaan said: Behold, O Paartha, my hundreds and thousands of divine forms, of myriad kinds, and of various colours and shapes.

In response to Arjuna's request, Shri Krishna immediately agreed to show Ishvara's divine form. This entire chapter, written in a poetic style, elaborately describes this form and Arjuna's reaction to it. It is said that the chanting of this chapter is one of the highest forms of meditation possible.

To get things started, Shri Krishna "turned on" the "screen" upon which this divine form could be shown to Arjuna. He began by revealing the amount of diversity in the sheer number of colours, shapes and forms that he was about to show to Arjuna. The literal words used are "hundreds" and "thousands", but in essence they mean infinite and innumerable.

While demonstrating the features of the latest LCD TV, the salesman will try his best to show as many channels he possibly can so that the customer is convinced about the capabilities of the TV such as number of pixels, colours and so on. Or if it's a sari shop, the salesperson will try to show innumerable varieties of the very same red colour so that the customer is confident about the range and variety in that shop's inventory.

Shri Krishna, however, was not concerned only with lining up the diversity of forms that he was ready to show. He also wanted to highlight that there was one thing common among that infinite diversity - Ishvara himself. He indicated this by saying "pashya me roopani" - behold my forms, not behold all these forms.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 6, Chapter 11

*pashyaadityaanvasoonrudraanaashvinau marutastathaa |
bahoonyadrishtapoorvaani pashyaashcharyaani bhaarata || 6 ||*

Behold the Aadityaas, the Vasus, the Rudraas, the Ashvinis as well as the Maruts, O Bhaarata. Behold the many astonishing (sights) that were invisible until now.

pashya : behold
adityaan : the Aadityaas
vasoon : the Vasus
rudraan : the Rudraas
ashvinau : the Ashvinis
marutaha : the Maruts
tathaa : as well as
bahooni : many
adrishta : invisible
poorvaani : until now
pashya : behold
aashcharyaani : astonishing
bhaarata : O Bhaarata

Shri Krishna continues to describe the Vishwa-roopa, the universal form of Ishvara. He now points to the deities and the demi-gods that are seen in his form, but were also mentioned as his divine expressions in the previous chapter. These were the twelve Aadityaas, the eight Vasus, the eleven Rudraas, the two Ashvinis and the forty-nine Maruts.

Arjuna would only have read about these deities in the scriptures. Now, he was fortunate enough to see those deities with those own eyes. Shri Krishna calls this fact to his attention by saying that these sights were invisible or inaccessible to everyone else but Arjuna. Also, Shri Krishna repeatedly says "pashya" or behold, to underscore this point.

If a teenager who is an ardent fan of Spiderman somehow manages to meet him in person, what would his reaction be? It is astonishment, "aascharya", which is defined as "that which makes us go aah", that which makes our mouth wide open for a very long time. Shri Krishna, further describing his form, says that these sights are nothing short of pure astonishment.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 11

*ihaikastham jagatkritsnam pashyaadya sacharaacharam |
mama dehe gudaakesha yachchaanyaddrishtumicchasi || 7 ||*

Behold this entire universe now, with moving and non-moving (entities), in one place. Also, besides this, O Gudaakesha, see whatever else you desire in my form.

Nowadays, it is common for families to capture a wedding with a video as well as with photographs. So when a guest drops by a family that has just concluded a wedding, he is hit with a barrage of photos and a DVD of the wedding that could last three to four hours. The guest cannot refuse this demand because the family wants him to experience the entire wedding "right here, right now".

So by using the words "now" and "in one place", Shri Krishna is pointing out the power of the Vishwa roopa or cosmic form. Arjuna is able to view the entire universe in one place, without leaving his chariot. Moreover, he is also able to view events that take millions of years in a split second. And what is he able to view? Everything including entities that move, and entities that are stable.

Now, if someone were to offer us the outcome of all the events that were to take place tomorrow, and if our favourite team was contesting a match tomorrow, we would be most interested in learning the outcome of the match. Knowing that Arjuna was most interested in the outcome of the Mahaabhaarata war, Shri Krishna suggested that even that would be visible in his cosmic form. He refers to Arjuna as "Gudaakesha", one who has conquered sleep, so that Arjuna would remain alert while watching the cosmic form.

However, with all this going on, there seemed to be no response from Arjuna. What could be the reason? We shall see next.

iha : this
ekastham : in one place
jagat : universe
kritsnam : entire
pashya : behold
adya : now
sacharaacharam : with moving and non-moving
mama : my
dehe : form
gudaakesha : O Gudaakesha
yat : whatever else
cha : also
anyat : besides
drishtum : see
icchasi : you desire

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 11

*na tu maam shakyase drishtumanenaiva svachakshushaa |
divyam dadaami te chakshuhu pashya me yogaishvaram || 8 ||*

But, even this you cannot see with your own eye. I give you a divine eye, (so that you can) see the majesty of my yoga.

Even after Shri Krishna had begun displaying his Vishwa roopa, his cosmic form, there seemed to be no response from Arjuna at all. He realized that Arjuna's mortal eyes did not have the capability needed to view the cosmic form. So he blessed Arjuna with the "divya drishti", the divine vision with which the yoga, the power of creating this diversity in the universe, could be seen in all its majesty.

Before we proceed with the rest of this chapter, let us pause to dig a little deeper into this shloka. Each chapter in the Gita is a "yoga", a technique for lifting us higher from the material to the divine. Arjuna was bestowed this vision by Shri Krishna, and we will hear a description of that vision from Sanjaya and Arjuna later in the chapter. But if this chapter is meant to give us a practical technique, what are we supposed to do? What does "divine vision" mean for us?

Let us consider a person from India who is deeply attached to his state or territory. As we have seen repeatedly in the Gita, any sort of deep attachment is a recipe for creating never-ending sorrow. What technique, what yoga could be prescribed for someone in this situation? One could ask that person to get a map of India, look at his state's border, then mentally erase that border as well as all the other state borders, and see what's left.

What will he see? He will only see the border of India. There would be no other divisions or distinctions. All conflicts regarding one state versus another would seem meaningless. It does not mean that the sense of attachment has gone away. That is very difficult to achieve. It simply means that the sense of attachment has been raised one step from the relative to the absolute.

Similarly, Shri Krishna asks all of us to view the world with the vision that everything is in Ishvara. Our eyes, limited as they are, will always report divisions and distinctions. That is their nature. But we can always use our intelligence to look through those divisions and see

na : not
tu : but
maam : my
shakyase : can
drishtum : you see
anena : this
eva : even
svachakshushaa : with your own eye
divyam : divine
dadaami : I give
te : you
chakshuhu : eye
pashya : see
me : my
yoga : yoga
ishvaram : majesty

that ultimately, Ishvara is in everything and everything is in Ishvara. If we learn to do this, our attachment to worldly concerns will drop, and shift towards Ishvara.

As we move to the next verse, we will find that the original narrator, Sanjaya, has taken over.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 9, Chapter 11**Sanjaya uvaacha:**evamuktvaa tato raajanmahaayogeshvaro harihi |**darshayaamaasa paarthaaya paramam roopamaishvaram || 9 ||*

evam : this
 uktvaa : having spoken
 tataha : then
 raajan : O King
 mahaayogeshvaraha : great Yogeshwara
 harihi : Hari
 darshayaamaasa : showed
 paarthaaya : to Paartha
 paramam : supreme
 roopam : form
 aishvaram : of Ishvara

Sanjaya said: O King, then having spoken this, Hari, the great Yogeshwara, showed the supreme form of Ishvara to Paartha.

At this point in the Gita, neither Shri Krishna nor Arjuna could continue narrating since Shri Krishna was showing the cosmic form, and Arjuna was taking it all in. The great sage Veda Vyaasa, the compiler of the Mahaabhaarata, chose to switch the narration over to Sanjaya, who was relaying the events to Dhritraashtra, the "King" that is mentioned in this shloka.

We notice a subtle shift in the language used by Sanjaya. His praise of Shri Krishna is one degree higher than that used by Arjuna. For instance, he refers to Shri Krishna as "Mahaa Yogeshwara" whereas Arjuna uses "Yogeshwara". It is because Sanjaya knew Shri Krishna more thoroughly and deeply than Arjuna did. Moreover, he was already blessed with divine vision through Vyaasa, which enabled him to see exactly what Arjuna saw.

Sant Jnyaneshwara's commentary of this shloka emphasizes Arjuna's good fortune of being able to view this cosmic form. He lists Lakshmi, Shesha and Garuda as tireless servants of Lord Vishnu who have yet to see the cosmic form that Arjuna sees, underscoring the love Shri Krishna for his devotee Arjuna. He also enumerates others who were able to see a tiny glimpse of this cosmic form including Yashoda and Dhruva.

So what did this form look like? The description begins in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 11

anekavaktranayanamanekaadbhutadarshanam |
anekadivyaabharanam divyaanekodyataayudham || 10 ||

aneka : several
vaktra : faces
nayanam : eyes
adbhutadarshanam : marvellous sights
divya : divine
aabharanam : ornaments
udyata : uplifted
aayudham : weapons

With several faces and eyes, showing several marvellous sights, wearing several divine ornaments, armed with several divine uplifted weapons.

Shri Krishna has a unique style of communication. Like an artist, he first sketches out a broad outline of what he wants to cover, and then step by step fills in the colour to create a grand painting. We see this style in the way he reveals the Vishwa roopa, the cosmic form to Arjuna. First, he reveals the scale and the vastness of the cosmic form by repeatedly using the word "aneka". "Aneka" means several but it is used in the sense of "infinite" here. We can only imagine Arjuna's state of mind when his friend transformed into this colossal being with infinite number of faces and eyes.

When someone is confronted with such a mighty spectacle, they want to take it all in. The Sistine chapel in the Vatican is an example of an artwork where most people are so overwhelmed with all the details and the complexity that they don't know where to look. The cosmic form surrounded and engulfed Arjuna to such an extent, there were so many sights to see, that he did not know where should he look and where shouldn't he look.

Now, as a hint of things to come, Shri Krishna displays both aspects of his personality. On one hand he is decked in fine jewellery and ornaments, creating a sight that is pleasing to the eye. But on the other hand his weapons show another aspect to his personality, that he has the potential to use destructive force if necessary.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 11

*divyamaalyaambaradharam divyagandhaanulepanam |
sarvaashcharyamayam devamanantam vishvatomukham || 11 ||*

Wearing divine garlands and clothes, anointed with divine fragrances, all of these wonderful (sights) were shining and infinite, with faces on all sides.

divyam : divine
aalyaa : garlands
ambara : clothes
dharam : wearing
gandhaan : anointed
anulepanam : anointed with
sarvaashcharyam : all wonderful
ayam : these
devam : shining
anantam : infinite
vishvatomukham : faces on all sides

Sanjaya continues the description of Ishvara's cosmic form in this shloka. Shri Krishna, after giving a hint of Ishvara's destructive power to Arjuna, showed his soumya roopa or his pleasing form. In other words, all the five senses and the mind enjoyed taking in this pleasant form. To that end, Arjuna saw Ishvara dressed up in fine clothes and garlands, as well as anointed with divine perfumes.

Another aspect of this form that it did not have a "centre". Whenever we try to worship God, we always choose either an idol or an image so that we can focus our thoughts. However, many of us tend to get fixated on one deity, image or idol and consequently shun other deities. Sanjaya, in describing the cosmic form, noted that it had "infinite faces". In other words, whenever Arjuna tried to pinpoint one face and say "this is Ishvara", he would fail. Shri Krishna did this to remove any prior conceptions of Ishvara that Arjuna would have harboured.

Now, we always need to keep one thing in mind when we contemplate the cosmic form - there is oneness behind all the diversity. It is all one being, ultimately. Just like the millions of cells, tissues and organs in our body serve one person, all the diversity seen in the cosmic form serves one Ishvara. Our minds are used to dividing things, cutting up things. The cosmic form is meant to reverse that process and unify everything.

Sanjaya used the word "devam" which means shining to describe this form. He elaborates on this in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 11

*divi sooryasahastrasya bhavedyugapadutthitaa |
yadi bhaahaa sadrishee saa syaadbhaasastasya mahaatmanaha || 12 ||*

Should thousands of suns happen to rise in the sky simultaneously, their blaze would resemble the light of that magnificent one.

divi : in the sky
sooryasahastrasya : thousands of suns
bhavet : happen
yugapat : simultaneously
utthitaa : rise
yadi : should
bhaahaa : light
sadrishee : resemble
saa : those
syaat : happen
bhaasaha : blaze
tasya : of that
mahaatmanaha : magnificent one

To better give us an idea of the level of cosmic form's brightness, Sanjaya compares to the radiance emitted by an infinite number of suns rising at the same time. Note that "sahasra" means infinite and not the literal meaning, which is thousand. Some scientists who have witnessed nuclear explosions have also used similar language to describe something that is bright beyond comparison.

So where does this radiance come from? Let us investigate. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad is one of the primary texts that discusses topics regarding the eternal essence. In one instance, it uses the phrase "effulgent infinite being" to describe the eternal essence. This is the source of the radiance. We never get to experience it because it is covered up by the material world. In this case, Shri Krishna enabled Arjuna to see the infinite light and radiance of the eternal essence in its pristine form.

We also have to remember that the comparison made by Sanjaya is helpful, but compares two things that are difficult to compare. Even the brilliance of infinite suns is still a brilliance of the material world, whereas Ishvara's brilliance is divine, far superior that any material brilliance.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 11

*tatrakastham jagatkritsnam pravibhaktamanekadhaa |
apashyaddevedasya shareere paandavastadaa || 13 ||*

tatra : that
ekastham : located in one place
jagat : universe
kritsnam : entire
pravibhaktam : with many divisions
anekadhaa : several
apashyat : saw
devedasya : lord of lords
shareere : in the body
paandavaha : the Paandava
tadaa : then

Then, the Paandava saw the entire universe with many divisions located in one place in the body of that lord of lords.

Previously, Arjuna was overwhelmed by the sheer vastness of Ishvara's cosmic form. There was so much going on, so many shapes and forms, that he did not know where to look. He took some time to get accustomed to the radiance emitted from that form. Now that his vision became a little clearer, he saw the entire universe with the earth, the sky, the oceans, animals, plants, trees and humans in one tiny corner of that vast cosmic form.

Sant Jnyanadeva provides some illustrations to convey the how small the universe looked. It was like a few atoms on Mount Meru, a few bubbles in the vast ocean and an ant-hill on planet earth. Such was the vastness of the cosmic form that even our universe looked puny. In the Srimad Bhagavatam, we see a similar description. Yashoda saw herself and her village in a tiny corner of the universe that was situated in the yawning toddler Shri Krishna's mouth.

In this shloka, Arjuna quite literally saw "the big picture". Like us, he was concerned and preoccupied with his problems, his challenges and his worries. He now came face to face with "ananta koti brahmanda naayaka", the lord of an infinite number of universes. When Arjuna saw Ishvara's cosmic form, he realized that the universe is nothing but a small fraction of Ishvara's creation. The tiny wave realized how huge the ocean really is.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 11

*tataha sa vismayaavishto hrishtaromaa dhananjaya |
pranamya shirasaa devam kritaanjalirabhaashata || 14 ||*

Thereafter, filled with bewilderment, his hair standing on end, Dhananjaya, with folded hands, bowed his head to the lord and began to speak.

tataha : thereafter
saha : he
vismaya : bewilderment
avishtaha : filled with
hrishtaromaaha : hair standing on end
dhananjaya : Dhananjaya
pranamya : bowed
shirasaa : his head
devam : to the lord
kritaanjalihi : with folded hands
abhaashata : said

So far, Arjuna was reeling under the shock of viewing the cosmic form of Ishvara. Sanjaya paints a wonderful picture of Arjuna's reaction to this earth-shattering event. Filled with awe and astonishment, Arjuna's body reacted with goose bumps. Once the extent of the shock receded to some extent, he gained back his faculties and mustered the energy to start speaking again.

Another aspect of this shloka is revealed by the phrase "bowed his head to the lord". Arjuna, scion of the great Kuru dynasty was a proud warrior, one of the finest archers in the land. There were few instances in his life where he faced a situation that would have humbled him. Seeing the entire universe in one tiny corner of the cosmic form put his accomplishments in the right perspective, taking all his pride away. He realized that he was nothing, his greatness was nothing compared to the glory of that infinite Ishvara.

So whenever we feel we have accomplished something great, whenever our ego starts to puff up, or even when we feel our personal problems are weighing down upon us, we should do what Arjuna did: fold our hands and bow our head to Ishvara. Our feats and problems are tiny compared to the expanse and power of Ishvara's universe.

Arjuna begins to describe Ishvara's cosmic form in the next shloka.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 11**Arjuna uvaaacha:**pashyaami devaamstava deva dehe sarvaanstathaa bhootavisheshasanghaan |
brahmaanameesham kamalaasanasthamrisheenshcha sarvaanuragaanshcha di-
vyaan || 15 ||*

Arjuna said: O Lord, I see deities as well as special classes of beings in your body. Brahma, the lord, seated upon a lotus, and all the sages and divine serpents.

Whenever our emotions are running high, we either keep quiet or speak non-stop. Arjuna now comes out of his silence and speaks at a fast pace to describe what he sees in front of him. The meter of this shloka has changed to indicate the change in pace. Traditionally, these shlokas are also chanted at a slightly faster speed to get their full flavour. So what does Arjuna see?

Arjuna says that he sees all kinds of deities and other kinds of beings, which include Lord Brahma seated upon a lotus, as well as the divine sages and divine serpents. The sages include the sapta-rishis such as Vashishtha and the serpents include Vasuki. We had come across these and other beings in the prior chapter when Ishvara himself described his divine manifestations. But Arjuna does not see all of these in different places. He sees them all situated on Ishvara's cosmic form.

What does this indicate? The sages live on earth, the deities live in a higher plane, and serpents live in yet another plane. Arjuna realizes that he is seeing worlds that beyond the earth and beyond the human capacity of vision. He also saw Lord Brahma who, according to Srimad Bhagavatam, arose out the navel of Lord Vishnu and created all the worlds.

So Arjuna, in the cosmic form, saw the creator and his creation. More importantly, he realized that Ishvara was beyond the process creation, which he had learned in the eighth chapter.

pashyaami : I see
devaam : deities
tava : your
deva : O Lord
dehe : in your body
sarvaan : all
tathaa : as well as
bhoota : beings
vishesha : special
sanghaan : classes
brahmaanam : Brahma
eesham : the lord
kamala : lotus
asanastham : seated upon
risheen : sages
cha : and
sarvaan : all
uragaan : serpents
cha : and
divyaan : divine

Notes

1. "Eesham" could also mean Lord Shiva. This indicates that Arjuna saw both creation and dissolution in the cosmic form.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 11

*anekabaahoodaravaktranetram pashyaami tvaam sarvatonantaroopam
naantam na madhyam na punastavaadim pashyaami vishveshvara vishva-
roopa || 16 ||*

I see you with numerous hands, bellies, mouths and eyes, with infinite forms from all sides. I see no end, middle and beginning of you, O lord of the universe, O cosmic form.

Arjuna, in his hasty speech, fleshes out the detailed imagery of Ishvara's cosmic form. He now sees an infinite number of forms, but his mind cannot in any way comprehend or point out what is being seen. It is only able to process parts of this image - hands, mouths, eyes and so on, but is not able to make sense of the whole picture. The fable of the blind men who could only touch parts of the elephant comes to mind here. One blind man thought that the trunk was a rope, the ear was a sieve and so on, but they did not realize that they were touching an elephant.

When Arjuna could not figure out how the various eyes, hands, bellies and mouth fit together, he tried to see whether the entire cosmic form had a shape or an outline to it. As a warrior, he was trained to look at a gigantic military formation and make sense of it based on its shape. But his mind failed there as well. He was not able to locate where that cosmic form began, where its middle was, and where it ended. All our mental functions are useless when we cannot distinguish one thing from another.

We may be tempted to visualize the cosmic form based on some artistic rendition of this shloka that we would have seen in our childhood, especially when we were growing up in India. Most paintings of this shloka show Shri Krishna as a tall entity with many arms, legs and faces but we can still see the battlefield where he is standing on. However, Arjuna was completely engulfed and surrounded by this cosmic form in all three dimensions, "from all sides" as the shloka reads. It is impossible for a human to visualize and capture it accurately in a painting.

Through this shloka, Shri Krishna reveals the limitations of the mind with its tendency to chop up everything into fragments. It fails to understand Ishvara's mind which is operating at the cosmic level. Our

aneka : numerous
baahuhu : hands
udaraha : bellies
vaktra : mouths
netram : eyes
pashyaami : I see
tvaam : you
sarvataha : from all sides
anantaroopam : infinite forms
na : no
antam : end
madhyam : middle
punaha : and
tava : your
aadim : beginning
pashyaami : I see
vishveshvara : O lord of the universe
vishvaroopam : O cosmic form

thoughts are limited to what we consider "me" and "mine", but Ishvara's thoughts take the entire universe into account. Furthermore, it also indicates that all names and forms arise from Ishvara and merge back into Ishvara.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 11

*kireeteenam gadinam chakrinam cha tejoraashim sarvato deeptimantam |
 pashyaami tvaam durnireekshyam samantaadyeptaanalaarkadyutimaprameyam
 || 17 ||*

I see you with a crown, mace and discus, glowing with an abundance of brilliance everywhere. The blazing fire of sunlight from all sides makes you incomprehensible, difficult to perceive.

kireeteenam : with crown
 gadinam : with mace
 chakrinam : with discus
 cha : and
 tejoraashim : abundance of brilliance
 sarvataha : everywhere
 deeptimantam : glowing
 pashyaami : I see
 tvaam : you
 durnireekshyam : difficult to perceive
 with eye
 samantaat : from all sides
 deeptaanala : blazing fire
 arkadyutim : sunlight
 aprameyam : incomprehensible

As he saw more aspects of the cosmic form, Arjuna realized that he could also see divinity in that form, not just the material world. The mace and discus that he saw are weapons of Lord Vishnu. They symbolize spiritual discipline and the destructive power of time, respectively. Another symbol of Lord Vishnu is the conch, which symbolizes a call to action and a rebuke against lethargy. Arjuna also sees a crown because Ishvara is the ultimate commander and does not move under the control of any selfish desires.

"The blazing fire of sunlight", "abundance of brilliance everywhere" - these poetic phrases convey the light of the eternal essence that Arjuna saw in the cosmic form. It is the same eternal essence that resides within all of us, but is covered with a layer of avidya or ignorance. As we have seen earlier, the eternal essence inside us enables our mind, intellect, senses and body to function. Ishvara, the purest embodiment of the eternal essence, shines like an infinite number of suns, without anything to obstruct its brilliance.

Now, no matter how hard he tried, Arjuna was not able to accurately capture his experience in words. This is because the eternal experience is not an object that can be perceived with the senses and described by our mind and intellect. He admits this limitation of his mind by declaring that the cosmic form is "aprameyam", it is incomprehensible.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 11

tvam aksharam paramam veditavyam tvamasya vishvasya param nidhaanam
 |
tvamavyayaha shaashvatadharmagoptaa sanaatanastvam purusho mato me
 || 18 ||

You are the imperishable, supreme (being) to be known. You are the supreme foundation of this universe. You are indivisible, the protector of the eternal law. In my opinion, you are the indivisible person.

tvam : you
 aksharam : imperishable
 paramam : supreme
 veditavyam : to be known
 tvam : you
 asya : this
 vishvasya : of this universe
 param : supreme
 nidhaanam : foundation
 tvam : you
 avyayaha : indivisible
 shaashvatadharmam : eternal law
 goptaa : protector
 sanaatana : eternal
 tvam : you
 purushaha : person
 mataha : opinion
 me : my

This shloka is a beautiful blend of upasaana (worship) and jnyaana (knowledge). Arjuna praises Ishvara's cosmic form, and also reveals his understanding of the relationship between Ishvara and the eternal essence. It is similar to the relationship between the ocean and water that we have seen several times before.

The ocean is the foundation in which several waves are created, sustained and destroyed. Each of those waves thinks that it is separate from the ocean, and is also aware of its mortality. But the water in the ocean and the water in the wave is the same. It is indivisible, eternal, infinite and imperishable. All waves are subject to the universal laws of gravity - whatever goes up, must come down.

Similarly, Ishvara is the foundation which creates, sustains and dissolves this universe of names and forms. Each being thinks that it is separate from Ishvara, and is trapped in sorrow because of its finitude. It does not realize that it is the dweller or the Purusha, made up of the very same eternal essence that Ishvara is, like the ocean and the wave are made up of water. Also, all beings are subject to the universal law of karma, of actions generating results. Ishvara is praised as the protector of this law.

The Gita repeatedly urges us to discard all sectarian notions we have of Ishvara. Next time, when we prostrate in front of Ishvara in the form of a deity, we should try to think of Ishvara in the form that is described here.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 11

anaadimadhyantamanantaveeryamanantabaahum shashisooryanetram |
pashyaami tvaam deeptahutaashavaktram svatejasaa vishvamidam tapantam
 || 19 ||

I see you without beginning, middle and end, with infinite prowess and infinite arms, with the moon and sun as your eyes, with blazing fire out of your mouth. Your radiance burns this universe.

Ishvara's infinite nature is highlighted by Arjuna in this shloka. He repeatedly tried to search for the beginning, middle and end of Ishvara's cosmic form, but fails to do so. He does find something for his mind to hold onto. The moon and the sun are seen as the eyes of the cosmic form. This is useful because it lets us, to the best of our mind's ability, as a pointer to remembering Ishvara's cosmic form when we see the moon or the sun.

Next, Arjuna describes Ishvara's powerful prana shakti. Our prana powers all of our physiological functions. It enables us to digest food, move our hands and legs, circulate the blood and so on. Similarly, the cosmic prana of Ishvara also powers the universe, but is infinitely more powerful than our prana. This is revealed through the infinite arms seen by Arjuna, that represent the infinite prowess and power to perform actions.

Now, Arjuna begins to see a transformation in the cosmic form. It shifts from a pleasant picture to something a little different. Ishvara's mouth begins to emit fire, representing the prana in him that consumes food. The food here, however, refers to the offerings we make in the form of sacrifices. The offering, or "hutam", is consumed by Ishvara resulting in the fire from his mouth heating or powering the universe. This image reinforces the sacrificial wheel of the universe that was described in the third chapter.

anaadi : without beginning
 madhya : middle
 antam : end
 anantaveeryam : infinite prowess
 anantabaahum : infinite arms
 shashi : moon
 soorya : sun
 netram : eyes
 pashyaami : I see
 tvaam : you
 deapta : blazing
 hutaashavaktram : fire coming out of mouth
 svatejasaa : your radiance
 vishvam : universe
 idam : this
 tapantam : burns

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 11

*dyaavaaprathivyoridamantaram hi vyaaptam tvayaikena dishashcha sarvaahaa |
 drashtvaadbhutam roopamagram tavedam lokatrayam pravayathitam mahaatman || 20 ||*

This distance between heaven, earth is and all directions is pervaded only by you alone. Having seen this, your fascinating and terrible form, the three worlds are afraid, O great one.

Nowadays, computers can be trained to recognize objects and faces. They do this by first taking a snapshot of a scene, and then differentiating between what is space is what is not. If they can do this differentiation correctly, they can compare the outlines of the "not-space" with outlines of familiar objects to arrive at a conclusion such as "this is a box" and so on.

Our eyes work in pretty much the same way. Whenever they see space, they do three things. First, they separate whatever they see as not-space and call those things "objects". Next, they send those objects to the mind which uses its memory to say "this is a box and a key". But in addition to recognizing objects, the mind also automatically adds another thought. Since the box and key are separated by space, they are far away from me and therefore not a part of me.

Our minds are conditioned to believe that Ishvara is sitting somewhere far away. He is separated from us by space, by distance. But when Arjuna saw the cosmic form, he realized that space is not different from Ishvara. In fact, Shri Krishna himself said that space is part of his nature in the seventh chapter. Ishvara is not separate and far away from us, he is with us all the time. In fact, he only exists, "ekena", all alone, by himself. We are not different from him. This is the main point of this shloka. Only by constantly remembering the cosmic form will we truly understand this message.

Now, Ishvara's ugra roopa, his terrible form, slowly replaces his saumya roopa, his pleasant for. For every pleasant experience in the world, there has to be a corresponding unpleasant experience as well. Once you label something as "good", there will be something "bad" by default. Seeing this frightful form of Ishvara, with fire coming out of all his mouths, all the three worlds were beginning to worry.

dyaavaaprathivyoho : heaven and earth
 idam : this
 antaram : distance
 hi : only
 vyaaptam : pervaded
 tvayaa : by you
 ekena : one
 dishashcha : directions
 sarvaahaa : all
 drashtvaa : having seen
 adbhutam : fascinating
 roopam : form
 agram : terrible
 tava : your
 idam : this
 lokatrayam : three worlds
 pravayathitam : afraid
 mahaatman : O great one

Bhagavad Gita Verse 21, Chapter 11

*amee hi tvaam surasanghaa vishanti kechidbheetaahaa praanjalayo grinanti |
svasteetyuktvaa maharshisiddhasanghaahaa stuvanti stvaam stutibhihi pushkalaab-
hihi || 21 ||*

Certainly, this host of deities enters into you. Many are scared, singing praises with folded hands, "may all be well", saying this. Hosts of great rishis and siddhas are praising you, through sublime hymns.

Arjuna's was beginning to see the cosmic form in more detail. Previously, he had mentioned that all the three worlds were quite afraid of Ishvara's fearful form. In one of those worlds, the heavenly world which was populated by the deities, he saw something quite amazing. The deities were arising out of Ishvara's cosmic form and dissolving back into it, just like waves in the ocean. He indicates this by using the word "vishanti", entering into.

This shloka brings out the different kinds of people with regards to their spiritual awareness. First, there are those who are completely engrossed in the material world of names and forms. They have very little to no awareness of the unity of things, of the presence of Ishvara in everything, due to extreme entanglement with their senses. Next, there are those seekers who have recognized the presence Ishvara, and are working hard to turn themselves towards the higher. Finally, there are those rare few who have transcended all names and forms, who have realized the absolute.

Arjuna saw all three types of people, the ignorant, the seekers, and the realized masters in this scene. The ignorant individuals and the seekers were dissolving into Ishvara, but only the seekers were singing praises of Ishvara since they knew that he was their ultimate goal. The realized masters, the sages and siddhas, stood apart from this process of creation and dissolution, singing hymns to glorify Ishvara.

amee : they
hi : certainly
tvaam : in you
surasanghaa : host of deities
vishanti : enter
kechit : many
bheetaahaa : scared
praanjalayaha : folded hands
grinanti : singing praises
iti : this
uktvaa : saying
maharshi : great rishis
siddha : siddhas
sanghaahaa : hosts of
stuvanti : praise
tvaam : you
stutibhihi : through hymns
pushkalaabhihi : sublime

Bhagavad Gita Verse 22, Chapter 11

*rudraaditya vasavo ye cha saadhya vishveshvinau marutashchoshmapaascha
|
gandharvayakshaasurasiddhasanghaa veekshante tvaam vismitaashchaiva sarve
|| 22 ||*

The hosts of Rudraas and Adityaas, the Vasus, the Saadhyaas, the Vishwadevaas, the Ashwini Kumaaraas, the Maruts, the Ushmapaas, the Gandharvas, the Yakshas, the Asuras and the Siddhas, all of them are amazed, observing you.

Previously, Arjuna had heard about Ishvara manifesting as deities in the universe. Now, in the cosmic form, he is able to see them clearly enough to recognize who they are. For most people during Arjuna's time, deities were worshipped but were inaccessible, they were invisible. Arjuna was clearly delighted to see those deities that were only invoked and worshipped in rituals. Even though these deities may have had meaning to Arjuna, they may not have meaning to many of us. So let's look more closely at these deities from our standpoint.

We may not worship the Vedic and Puraanic deities mentioned in this shloka, but we do worship material deities. If we want a telephone connection, we approach the telephone company. If we want an internet connection, we approach the internet service provider. If we want to admit a child into school, we approach the principal of that school. Broadly speaking, when we want to access something that is beyond our reach, we approach a deity and convince them to give us access to what we desire.

In all these cases, there are three aspects - the individual, the object of desire, and the deity that connects the individual to the object of desire. In many ancient texts, it is said that the universe split into 3 parts during the process of creation. The individual is known as the "adhyaatma", the world of objects known as the "adhibhoota" and the presiding deity that connects the two, the "adhidaiva".

It is said that we should worship a deity if we are seeking to acquire certain traits. If one wants to acquire strength and power, he should appease that adhidaiva who presides over a storehouse of strength. So we see that seekers of power worship Lord Hanumaan. Seekers of dispassion worship Lord Shiva. Seekers of knowledge worship Sarasvati

rudraaditya : the Rudraas and Adityaas
vasavaha : the Vasus
ye : those
cha : and
saadhya : the Saadhyaas
vishve : the Vishwadevaas
ashvinau : the Ashwini Kumaraas
marutaha : the Maruts
cha : and
ushmapaahaa : the Ushmapaas
cha : and
gandharva : the Gandharvas
yaksha : the Yakshas
asura : the Asuras
siddha : the Siddhas
sanghaa : hosts of
veekshante : are observing
tvaam : you
vismitaahaa : amazed
cha : and
eva : only
sarve : all

and so on.

So when we begin practicing meditation, we can choose a deity that we have a particular attraction to. Some people love to worship Shri Krishna in his childhood form, whereas some people worship Lord Shiva in his serene form. It does not matter which deity we choose as long as we use the deity to ultimately take our meditation all the way up to Ishvara.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 23, Chapter 11

*roopam mahatte bahuvaaktranetram mahaabaaho bahubaahooroopadam |
bahoodaram bahudamshttraakaraalam drishtvaa lokaahaa pravyathitaastathaa-
ham || 23 ||*

Seeing your grand form with several mouths and eyes, O mighty armed, with several arms, thighs, feet and bellies, with fearful fangs, all beings are disturbed, and (so too am) I.

roopam : form
mahat : grand
te : your
bahuvaaktranetram : with several mouths and eyes
mahaabaaho : O mighty armed
bahoodaram : with several bellies
bahudamshttraakaraalam : with fearful fangs
drishtvaa : seeing
lokaahaa : beings
pravyathitaahaa : disturbed
tatha : and
aham : I

Arjuna's amazement turned into fear as he witnessed the transformation of Ishvara's cosmic form. The "soumya roopa" or the pleasant form morphed into the "ugra roopa", the fear-inducing form. Shri Krishna's kind, shining face was no more visible. It now was the face of a monster, with long sharp teeth that were "kaarala", ready to take a bite.

When we see someone who has power but is benevolent and kind, we feel at peace. But when someone with power is clearly intent on causing destruction, we are afraid. When a general of a country army is disciplined and respects civilian authority, people are happy, otherwise he becomes a dictator and scares people. So therefore, seeing this terrible form of Ishvara, Arjuna saw that all beings in all of the worlds were cowering in fear of this form.

Why did Ishvara show this form to Arjuna? Didn't Shri Krishna want everyone to remember his pleasant form only? There is a reason to this. Earlier, we learned about the tendency of our mind to demarcate certain aspect of the world as "good" or "bad". But if we use the cosmic form as a means to meditate upon Ishvara, we need think like Ishvara. Ishvara comprises the entire creation where everything is necessary and everything has its place. We cannot demarcate anything good or bad. Only by discarding our prior conceptions of good and bad can we truly understand this terrible form of Ishvara.

What else about the form scared Arjuna? He continues in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 24, Chapter 11

nabhahasprisham deeptamanekavarnam vyaattaananam deeptavishaalanetram
 |
drishtvaa hi tvaam pravyathitaantaraatmaa dhritim na vindaami shamam cha
vishno || 24 ||

Seeing you touching the sky, glowing with several colours, with gaping mouths and large blazing eyes, my mind is scared. I have neither courage nor serenity, O Vishnu.

Arjuna describes just how gigantic the cosmic form looked. He says that it "touched the sky". Its size, combined with the horrible imagery that he saw, created a sight that was scarier than anything we can imagine. Arjuna says that it had an infinite number of colours, indicating the potential to create all kinds of names and forms. Furthermore, it had an infinite number of mouths wide open with fangs, as well as gigantic fiery eyes.

This "raudra roopa" or angry form of Ishvara had quite an impact on Arjuna. He admitted to Shri Krishna that he had lost his courage. For one of the world's foremost warriors that considers courage paramount to say such a thing indicates that this cosmic form must really have been something beyond the realm of our imagination.

Arjuna also admitted that he had lost all his serenity. In the second chapter, Shri Krishna mentioned that a "sthita-prajnya" or one who is established in the eternal essence has three key qualities: holistic vision, serenity of mind, and unattached living. Arjuna was a tranquil person by nature, but this manifestation of the cosmic form has the effect of destabilizing him.

From our perspective, even if we never see this terrible form, there are several instances in our life when we experience situations that make us lose our will to fight, and also take our serenity away. This shloka urges to recognize Ishvara's handiwork behind even those situations that make us lose faith in him, and to constantly remind ourselves that every unfortunate circumstance is a means for our self-purification.

Even though Arjuna wanted Shri Krishna to end displaying this cosmic form, there was more to come as we shall see next.

nabhahasprisham : touching the sky
 deeptam : glowing
 anekavarnam : several colours
 vyaatta : gaping
 aananam : mouths
 deeptavishaalanetram : large blazing eyes
 drishtvaa : seeing
 hi : for
 tvaam : you
 pravyathita : scared
 antaraatmaa : mind
 dhritim : courage
 na : no
 vindaami : I have
 shamam : serenity
 cha : and
 vishnoho : O Vishnu

Bhagavad Gita Verse 25, Chapter 11

*damshttraakaraalaani cha te mukhaani drishtaiva kaalaanalasannibhaani |
disho na jaane na labhe cha sharma praseeda devesha jagannivaasa || 25 ||*

Seeing you with dreadful tusks and your mouths blazing like fires of destruction, I neither know the directions nor do I have peace. Be pleased, O lord whose abode is the universe.

When we go beyond the imagery of this shloka and try to extract the meaning, we find that Arjuna comes face to face with a point of no return. He is unable to "know the directions", unable to decide where to run away from here. All the plans he has made to do this or that thing are suddenly no more. Many people who come face to face with their mortality may have thoughts similar to what Arjuna is echoing here.

I came across a website of a terminal cancer patient who wrote his obituary just before he passed away. Here's an excerpt from that website:

...It turns out that no one can imagine what's really coming in our lives. We can plan, and do what we enjoy, but we can't expect our plans to work out. Some of them might, while most probably won't. Inventions and ideas will appear, and events will occur, that we could never foresee. That's neither bad nor good, but it is real.

I think and hope that's what my daughters can take from my disease and death. And that my wonderful, amazing wife can see too. Not that they could die any day, but that they should pursue what they enjoy, and what stimulates their minds, as much as possible. So they can be ready for opportunities, as well as not disappointed when things go sideways, as they inevitably do...

So when we realize that ultimately, we are powerless in front of the grand scheme of the cosmos, our ego drops all its pretenses and surrenders itself in prayer to Ishvara. Prayer is only possible when there is utter surrender of individuality. So Arjuna prays to Shri Krishna, urging him to return to his pleasing form. But Shri Krishna is not done yet.

damshttraa : tusks
karaalaani : with dreadful
cha : and
te : your
mukhaani : mouths
drishta : seeing
eva : only
kaalaanala : fires of destruction
sannibhaani : blazing like
dishaha : directions
na : not
jaane : I know
na : not
labhe : have
cha : and
sharma : peace
praseeda : be pleased
devesha : O lord
jagannivaasa : whose abode is this
universe

Bhagavad Gita Verse 26, Chapter 11

amee cha tvaam dhritaraashtrasya putraahaa sarve sahaivaavanipaalasanghai
 |
 bheeshmo dronaha sootaputrastathaasau sahaasmadeeyairapi yodhamukhyaihi
 || 26 ||

amee : these
 cha : and
 tvaam : you
 dhritaraashtrasya : of Dhritaraashtra
 putraahaa : sons
 sarve : all
 saha : with
 eva : only
 avanipaala : warrior kings
 sanghai : bands of
 bheeshmaha : Bheeshma
 dronaha : Drona
 sootaputrah : son of Soota
 tathaa : also
 asau : that
 saha : with
 asmadeeyahi : our
 api : also
 yodhamukhyaihi : prime warriors

And all the sons of Dhritaraashtra, with bands of warrior kings, and also Bheeshma, Drona, and also that son of Soota, along with our prime warriors..

Shri Krishna had a surprise in store for Arjuna, even though Arjuna wanted him to stop showing his terrible form. Among all the scenes shown on the canvas of the cosmic form, Arjuna began to see the Mahabhaarata war. However, he saw things that had not happened so far. In other words, Shri Krishna was showing him the future.

Maaya, Ishvara's great power, creates space and time. Space and time create the sense of separateness between us and the universe. Both space and time are interrelated. The larger the space, the more time it takes to go from one corner to another. A fish can traverse a bowl much faster than it can traverse a giant aquarium tank. Only Ishvara, who is beyond the notion of space and time, could show a scene that was to occur in the future, like a movie director who solely knows the outcome of a script.

Earlier, Shri Krishna had destroyed all notion of space, since it appeared that everyone and everything had congealed together in his cosmic form. Now, he began eliminating the notion of time. Arjuna could see the past, present and future all at once in the cosmic form. He now saw the Paandava and the Kaurava armies in that scene. He had a special place of dislike for Karna, calling him "that son of a Suta". Suta refers to one whose mother is a brahmin and

father is a kshatriya.

So then, what was happening to all these warriors? This shloka continues further.
 indexavanipaala

Bhagavad Gita Verse 27, Chapter 11

vaktraani te tvaramaanaa vishanti damshttraakaraalaani bhayaanakaani |
kechidvilagnaa dashanaantareshu sandrishyante choornitairuttamaangaihi | |
 27 | |

(They are) rushing to enter into your mouths, with fearful fangs, wide open. Some appear with their skulls crushed, stuck between your teeth.

vaktraani : mouths
 te : your
 tvaramaanaahaa : rushing
 vishanti : entering
 damshttraakaraalaani : wide open fangs
 bhayaanakaani : fearful
 kechit : some
 vilagnaahaa : caught
 dashanaantareshu : between teeth
 sandrishyante : appear
 choornitaihi : crushed
 uttamaangaihi : skulls

Arjuna continued to narrate the horrifying scene from the future state of the Mahabhaarata war. He now saw several warriors from both armies rushing to enter the numerous mouths of Ishvara's cosmic form. He also saw Ishvara devouring these warriors, with the remnants of his meal stuck between the gaps of his teeth. Arjuna uses the word "choornit" meaning powder to highlight the force of Ishvara's jaws and their impact on the warriors.

This gruesome scene serves to remind us of the ephemerality of the material world comprised solely of names and forms. If Ishvara can create the variety of names and forms in his pleasant form, he can also dissolve that variety in his terrible form. Arjuna saw this vision quite clearly, as did many people in the northeastern United States that were impacted recently by the most powerful hurricane in history. Ishvara's power can level entire towns within minutes.

Another intriguing aspect of this shloka is that Ishvara's cosmic form isn't going after all the warriors, in fact, they themselves are rushing into his mouths. It reinforces the message given by Shri Krishna earlier. Ishvara does not favour or hate anyone. Every individual creates his own destiny by the fruit of his choices and actions. The Kauravas and Paandavas decided to engage in a war, so it was natural that many of them would end up dead when the war ended.

Now, knowing that Shri Krishna could show him the future, Arjuna was curious to know whether he would win or lose. But he did not ask this question directly. He continued describing the scene, hoping that Shri Krishna would reveal it eventually.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 28, Chapter 11

*yathaa nadeenaam bahavombuvegaahaa samudramevaabhimukhaa dravanti |
tathaa tavaamee naralokaveeraa vishanti vaktraanyabhivijvalanti || 28 ||*

Like torrents of several rivers rush towards the ocean, so do those brave men of this earth run to your blazing mouths.

Putumayo, Caqueta, Vaupes, Guainea, Morona, Pastaza, Nucuray, Urituyacu, Chambira, Tigre, Nanay, Napo, and Huallaga. These are names of just a handful of 1100 rivers that feed the Amazon, the largest river in the world by volume. It covers almost 7 million square kilometres of land in South America, and empties 300,000 cubic metres per second into the Atlantic Ocean. The most distant source of the Andes is a glacier on the western edge of South America, near the Pacific Ocean, on the other side of the continent.

Arjuna, on seeing the hordes of warriors rushing into Ishvara's mouths, compares them to the water in a river rushing with great speed into the ocean. It reminds him of Shri Krishna's description of the water cycle as a sacrifice when he was explaining karma yoga. A drop of water which originated from the ocean evaporates into the sky, falls down as rain into a water body, and eventually finds its way into a flowing river that goes right back into its source, the ocean. At one point it thinks that it is rain, or it is a pond, a lake, a stream and so on, forgetting its true nature as water.

Similarly, we tend to think of ourselves as children, students, engineers, executives, rich people, poor people at different points in our lives, and forgetting that our journey is just a cycle that begins from Ishvara, the source, and ends back into that same source. So even though Arjuna was scared of Ishvara's monstrous form, he understood that there was nothing to be scared about destruction. It was a bona fide part of Ishvara's creative process.

Arjuna illustrates another aspect of this scene in the next shloka.

yathaa : like
nadeenaam : rivers
bahavaha : several
ambuvegaahaa : torrents
samudram : ocean
eva : only
abhimukhaa : towards
dravanti : rush
tathaa : so do
tava : to you
amee : those
naralokaveeraa : brave men of the earth
vishanti : run
vaktraani : mouths
abhivijvalanti : blazing

Bhagavad Gita Verse 29, Chapter 11

yathaa pradeeptam jvalanam patangaa vishanti naashaaya samriddhavegaahaa |
tathaiva naashaaya vishanti lokaastavaapi vaktraani samriddhavegaahaa ||
 29 ||

Like moths enter a blazing fire with great speed for their destruction, so also do these people enter your mouths with great speed for their destruction.

In the previous shloka, Arjuna gave the example of rivers flowing into the ocean to indicate the ultimate dissolution of all names and forms back to their source, Ishvara. Some may raise a doubt here. They may say, water is inert so naturally it goes wherever the flow takes it. In order to dispel this doubt, Arjuna gives the example of moths that rush towards a flame, and are eventually destroyed. Sant Jnyaneshwar gives the example of water droplets evaporating on a hot iron rod in his commentary.

By showing the process of destruction at such a grand scale, Shri Krishna also wants to remove Arjuna's fear of death. Since the physical body goes away after death, there is no question of pain once we die. We are scared not about the pain of death, but about losing all of our identity as a so-and so, with all his possessions and attachments. The name and form that we have become attached, and its network of relationships with other names and forms, is what ultimately gets dissolved.

But when we know that death is nothing but a return of our name and form into that of Ishvara's, our fear of death will go away, or at least, diminish to a great extent. In fact, when we become a devotee of Ishvara, death loses its unpleasantness because now it means a return to the original source of the universe. We begin to lead our lives with a great degree of courage and fearlessness, because we know how it will all end.

yathaa : like
 pradeeptam : blazing
 jvalanam : fire
 patangaahaa : moths
 vishanti : enter
 naashaaya : for destruction
 samriddhavegaahaa : with great speed
 tathaa : so do
 eva : only
 naashaaya : for destruction
 vishanti : enter
 lokaaha : these people
 tava : your
 api : also
 vaktraani : mouths
 samriddhavegaahaa : with great speed

Bhagavad Gita Verse 30, Chapter 11

lelihyaase grasmaanaha samantaalokaansamagraanvadanairjvalabhdihi |
tejobhiraapoorya jagatsamagram bhaasastavograahaa prapanti vishno || 30
||

Devouring everyone from all sides, through your fiery mouths, you are licking (your lips). Your terrible rays, filling the universe with brilliance, are burning everything, O Vishnu.

When we are enjoying a particular tasty meal, we cannot resist licking our fingers and lips. It is a sign that we would like to have more. Also in Indian culture, wasting of food is not allowed, so we lick our fingers to ensure that nothing goes to waste. In the same way, Ishvara in his cosmic form thoroughly enjoys the process of destruction. He also ensures that nothing is spared, nothing goes to waste. Everything and everyone ultimately is destroyed.

Now, we may ask, isn't it cruel to derive pleasure from destruction? It may be true from a relative standpoint, but not from the absolute standpoint. If old trees and animals do not die in a jungle, new ones cannot be created. If old businesses aren't allowed to fail, new startups cannot bring innovative products to the market. If no one dies, the earth is unable to sustain the needs of an infinitely growing population.

Destruction is a necessary part of life. If we think like an individual, destruction is painful. If we think like Ishvara, destruction is enjoyable. It also creates dispassion towards the miseries of our human body, since we know it will be destroyed to create something new.

Arjuna continues to describe what he sees. He says that the rays of fire that are emitted by Shri Krishna are burning up the universe with their heat. He wants to take those fiery rays away. Since Shri Krishna has not yet listened to him, he asks him a question with the hope of gaining attention, and potentially, bringing back the form of Shri Krishna that he loves.

lelihyaase : licking
 grasmaanaha : devouring
 samantaat : from all sides
 lokaan : people
 samagraan : all
 vadanaihi : through mouths
 jvalabhdihi : fiery
 tejobhihi : with brilliance
 apoorya : filling
 jagat : universe
 samagram : everything
 bhaasaha : rays
 tava : your
 ugraahaa : terrible
 prapanti : burning
 vishno : O Vishnu

Bhagavad Gita Verse 31, Chapter 11

*aakhyaa hi me ko bhavaanugrarooopo namostute devavara praseeda |
vijnyaatumichhaami bhavantamaadyam na hi prajaanaami tava pravruttim
|| 31 ||*

Please reveal who you are, with such a fierce form. I bow to you, O best among deities, be gracious. I wish to know you, O ancient being, for I do not understand your purpose.

In the seventh book or canto of the Srimad Bhaagavatam, Lord Vishnu incarnates as the Lion Man Narasimha to slay Hiranyakashipu, the king of the demons. He then proceeds to destroy Hiranyakashipu's army. But his anger is not appeased even after doing so. Extremely scared and worried, the heavenly deities send Prahlaada, Lord Vishnu's devotee, to talk to Narasimha. He first praises Lord Vishnu, after which he asks him several questions. Appeasement, followed by humble questioning, is the best way to pacify an angry person, which is what Arjuna did to the fearful cosmic form of Ishvara in this shloka.

In the course of just a few moments, Shri Krishna transformed from his human form, to a gigantic cosmic form that was pleasing, then to another cosmic form that was extremely scary. Arjuna requested him to reveal who he was at this moment, and what was his mission and purpose for destroying everything. Even in his request there was humility and surrender, because Arjuna asked for the Lord's grace, knowing fully well that he was the "Aadyam", the original primal being of this universe.

The word "Aadyam" is used by Sant Jnyaneshwar in the first stanza of his commentary on the Gita known as the Jnyaaneshwari : "Om Namoji Aadya", meaning "my salutations to that primal being". This word is extremely significant in the context of this shloka. For someone or something to take on the responsibility of destruction, it has to be present before and after creation. It also has to be beyond all names and forms, because it is names and forms that are created and destroyed. So when the entire universe is dissolved, the same original being creates, sustains and destroys the universe again.

aakhyaa : please reveal
me : to me
kaha : who
bhavaan : you
ugrarooopaha : fierce form
namaha astu : I bow
te : to you
devavara : O best among deities
praseeda : be gracious
vijnyaatum : to know
ichhaami : I wish
bhavantam : you
aadyam : ancient being
na : not
hi : for
prajaanaami : do I understand
tava : your
pravruttim : purpose

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 32, Chapter 11**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:*

*kaalosmi lokakshayakritpravruddho lokaansamaahartumiha pravrutataha |
ritepi tvaam na bhavishyanti sarve yevasthitaahaa pratyaneekeshu yodhaahaa
|| 32 ||*

Shree Bhagavaan said:I am time, the seasoned annihilator of the worlds, engaged in destroying all these people. Even without your (effort), all those hostile warriors will not exist in the future.

kaalaha : time
asmi : I am
lokakshayakrit : annihilator of the
worlds
pravruddhaha : seasoned
lokaan : people
samaahartumiha : this destruction
pravrutataha : engaged
rite : without
api : even
tvaam : your
na : not
bhavishyanti : exist in the future
sarve : all
ye : those
avasthitaahaa : situated
pratyaneekeshu : hostile
yodhaahaa : warriors

After a long wait, Shri Krishna, as the cosmic form, spoke to Arjuna, revealing himself and his mission of destroying the universe and all the living beings residing in it. It is said that Robert Oppenheimer, creator of the atom bomb, uttered this shloka when he saw the power of his creation for the first time. Shri Krishna declared himself to be "kaala", which means time as well as death. They mean the same thing because in time, everything dies. He also used the word "pravruddha" which means mature or seasoned, indicating that he was well versed in the task of destruction, that it wasn't a one time thing.

Our mind works within the gamut of space and time, therefore it is difficult to comprehend what Arjuna saw. He probably saw the past, the present and the future happening in an instant, all at the same time. With this vision, Shri Krishna was able to show the future to Arjuna. The Mahaabhaarata war had ended, leaving few Kaurava warriors alive. In other words, Shri Krishna himself had determined that the war would be won by the Paandavas. They fought like any other army would, but the real work behind the scenes was done by Shri Krishna.

Many of us sometimes think, what will happen if I stop working one day? Lest we attach undue importance to our actions and puff up our ego, Shri Krishna gives us a lesson in humility. He reveals that ultimately, it is he who is running the show. If he wants to do something, he will do it with whatever means available, even if it means generating a thought in one person or in a million people.

Now, if we hear this, we may think, why should I do anything at all? I can retire right away since it is ultimately Ishvara who is doing everything. Arjuna probably had the same thought. He would have wondered what was the need for him to fight, reinforcing the argu-

ment he made in the first chapter when we wanted to run away from the war.

Anticipating this, Shri Krishna makes a bold statement in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 33, Chapter 11

*tasmaattvamuttishtha yasho labhasva jitvaa shatroombhungakshva raajyam
samriddham |
mayaivaite nihataaha pooravameva nimttamaatram bhava savyasaachin ||
33 ||*

Therefore, you arise, obtain valour by conquering your enemies, and enjoy the prosperity of your kingdom. All these (warriors) have been previously killed by me, so you become just an instrument, O Savyasaachin.

tasmaat : therefore
tvam : you
uttishtha : arise
yashaha : valour
labhasva : obtain
jitvaa : by conquering
shatroom : enemies
bhungakshva : enjoy
raajyam : kingdom
samriddham : prosperous
mayaa : by me
eva : only
ete : these
nihataaha : killed
pooravam : previously
nimttamaatram : just an instrument
bhava : become
savyasaachin : O Savyasaachin

When we buy a ticket to any Bollywood blockbuster, we know that no matter what happens, the hero will save the heroine from the clutches of the villain. But even though the ending is no surprise to anyone, we still want to sit for over two hours in a movie theatre. Why is that? We enjoy the drama, the emotional ups and downs, the fight sequences, the songs and so on. We want the movie to entertain us. Just because we know the ending, we don't stop watching movies.

Ishvara's grand spectacle, his "leela", works in similar ways. Shri Krishna had pre-planned the ending of the war, and had orchestrated the events in such a manner that it would result in the destruction of the Kauravaas. Knowing this, Arjuna would have liked very much to flee the war. Addressing Arjuna as Savyasaachin, one who could use both his hands in archery, Shri Krishna encouraged him to fight with all his might, defeat his enemies and enjoy the result of his actions. This is because Arjuna, like all of us, had a role to play in Ishvara's grand play of the universe, his "leela".

Here is the crux of karma yoga. If we fulfill our duties with a spirit of detachment, we align ourselves with Ishvara's vision. We become a "nimitta" or an instrument of Ishvara. But if we assert our selfish desires and our will, we only entrap ourselves in the material world and set ourselves up for a painful existence. Furthermore, Shri Krishna, in his generosity, was more than happy to let Arjuna take credit for his work. In fact, he encouraged him to do so. And in the midst of all this, there is no favouritism. The Kauravaas were annihilated as a result of their actions, not because of Shri Krishna's partiality towards the Pandavaas.

So now, who are the people who would be killed in the war? We

shall see in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 34, Chapter 11

*dronam cha bheeshmam cha jayadratham cha karnam tathaanyaanapi yod-
haveeraan |
mayaa hataanstvam jahi maa vyathishthaa yudhyasva jetosi rane sapatnaan
|| 34 ||*

Drona, Bheeshma and Jayadratha, Karna and other brave warriors have also been slain by me. So you kill them, do not be disturbed. Fight, and you will conquer your enemies in battle.

By this time, Arjuna's mind had lost all sense of composure. Never in his life had he gone through so many unimaginable visions in such a short span of time. First he saw Ishvara's pleasant cosmic form, then the fearful cosmic form, then he came to know the real nature of Ishvara's destructive power, and finally he came to know that every action in the universe was determined by Ishvara. Shri Krishna recognized this state of mind and gave clear, simple and precise instructions to Arjuna : do not worry, just fight.

What was the source of Arjuna's worry? Even since the war began, Arjuna was fearful of facing the most prominent warriors in the Kaurava army. Shri Krishna pointed them out here, maintaining the hierarchy of seniority: their guru Drona, the grandsire Bheeshma, Jayadratha who was protected by a divine boon, and Karna who was equal to Arjuna in prowess. He mentioned each of their names, implying that their fate was already sealed. There was no point in Arjuna worrying any more.

So then, what could Arjuna do? Shri Krishna said : just fight. Since all these mighty warriors have already killed by me, you kill them, not out of a sense of enmity or superiority, but out of a sense of performing your duty as a karma yogi. You be just be an instrument of Ishvara, that is the idea. Put the teaching of the Geeta into practice. If you perform actions in this manner, you will vanquish your enemies.

Sanjaya stepped in to describe Arjuna's reaction in the next shloka.

dronam : Drona
cha : and
bheeshmam : Bheeshma
jayadratham : Jayadratha
karnam : Karna
tathaa : also
anyaan : other
api : as well
yodhaveeraan : brave warriors
mayaa : by me
hataan : slain
tvam : you
jahi : kill
maa : do not
vyathishthaa : disturbed
yudhyasva : fight
jetosi : you will conquer
rane : in battle
sapatnaan : enemies

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 35, Chapter 11**Sanjaya uvaacha:*

etatchchutvaa vachanam keshavasya kritaanjaliropepamaanaha kireetee |
namaskritvaa bhooya evaaha krishnam sagadgadam bheetabheetaha pranamy
 || 35 ||

etat : this
 shrutvaa : hearing
 vachanam : statement
 keshavasya : of Keshava
 kritaanjalihi : folded palms
 vepamaanaha : trembling
 kireetee : the crowned one
 namaskritvaa : offered salutations
 bhooyaha : then
 eva : even
 aaha : addressed
 krishnam : Krishna
 sagadgadam : choked voice
 bheetabheetaha : fear struck
 pranamy : bowed

Sanjaya said:Hearing this statement of Keshava, the crowned one with folded palms, trembling, offered salutations, bowed, and even though fear struck, addressed Krishna in a choked voice.

While Arjuna experienced a high degree of fear mixed with confusion in the first chapter, he now demonstrated tremendous gratitude and joy after knowing that the war had been pre-ordained in his favour. The fear had not subsided fully, that is why his voice was choked and his body was trembling. Since there was a bit of a gap between Shri Krishna proclamation and Arjuna's next statement, Sanjaya stepped in to narrate this shloka.

Shri Shankaraachaarya in his commentary adds an extra dimension to Sanjaya's interjection. Since Shri Krishna had already declared the upcoming death of the Kaurava army's star warriors, Dhritraashtra could still have had one last opportunity to end the war at this very moment. Without saying it explicitly, Sanjaya asked: would he issue a command to stop the war now? He used the word "crown" to imply that Arjuna's coronation as the crown prince of the kingdom was not too far away.

Unfortunately, Sanjaya's plea fell on deaf ears. Dhritraashtra's attachment to his sons was so great that even a revelation from Ishvara himself could not unsettle it. But even he knew that the fate of his sons was already sealed. The downward spiral caused by attachment has been illustrated with several examples in earlier chapters of the Gita. Perhaps this example of Dhritraashtra is one of the most hard hitting ones, since attachment to family is something that all of us identify with.

So then, what did Arjuna say to Shri Krishna? We shall see next.

*Bhagavad Gite Verse 36, Chapter 11**Arjuna uvaacha:*

*sthaane hrishheeksha tava prakreertyaa jagatprahrashyatanurajyate cha |
 rakshaamsi bheetaani disho dravanti sarve namasyanti cha sidhhasanghaahaa
 || 36 ||*

sthaane : rightly
 hrishheeksha : O Hrishheeksha
 tava : your
 prakreertyaa : glories
 jagat : universe
 prahrashyati : elated
 anurajyate : enamoured
 cha : and
 rakshaamsi : demons
 bheetaani : out of fear
 dishaha : directions
 dravanti : run
 sarve : all
 namasyanti : bow
 cha : and
 sidhhasanghaahaa : hosts of siddhas

Arjuna said: Rightly, O Hrishheeksha, the universe is elated and enamoured by your glories. Demons run in all directions out of fear, and the hosts of siddhas bow to you.

Having understood the workings of Ishvara's universe, Arjuna responds with the powerful word "sthaane", which means everything that is going on is right, everything is in its place. As we saw earlier, we tend to question Ishvara every time there is a massive calamity, either at a personal level or at a global level. Or, we sometimes ask Ishvara to let things be a certain way. But when we understand that Ishvara is behind it all, and is orchestrating events for the benefit of the entire universe and not just a subset, we too, are compelled to say "sthaane", it is all right.

With this knowledge, we now know why people in our world are happy and unhappy at the same time. Those who view the world through Ishvara, those who have the vision of Ishvara, take delight in everything and hence they are happy. But those who view the world through their ego-driven vision fear Ishvara's destructive process, and then become unhappy. Rakshasaas or demons run in fear, while siddhas or perfected beings salute Ishvara.

Furthermore, Arjuna understands a wonderful technique by which we can gain immense dispassion towards the world. A child drops his attachment to his toys when he becomes an adult and gets attached to something higher than toys, like his career for instance. So when we develop a strong attachment to Ishvara, when we are enamoured, "anurajyate", by Ishvara, we automatically drop our worldly attachments. All we need to do is to direct our senses to Hrishheeksha, the master of the senses.

This shloka and the upcoming ten shlokas are one of the most beautiful prayers to Ishvara ever written.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 37, Chapter 11

*kasmaaccha te na nameranmahaatman gareeyase brahmanopyaadikartre |
ananta devesha jagannivaasa toamaksharam sadasattatparam yat || 37 ||*

And why should they not bow to you, O great one, most honourable and ancient creator of even Brahmaa? You are infinite, O lord of lords, O abode of the universe, you are imperishable, that which is beyond both the manifest and unmanifest.

Arjuna continues his prayer to Ishvara's cosmic form. Here, he justifies why people who have preference for a particular deity were seen offering their salutations to the cosmic form. He says that when we see someone superior in all respects to our deity, there is no reason not to bow to that person. Ishvara in his cosmic form is the original cause, the creator of Lord Brahmaa. Whereas Lord Brahmaa could create several universes, Ishvara creates several Lord Brahmaas. Therefore it is appropriate that people worship Ishvara.

Now, Arjuna described Ishvara as "sadasattatparam". What does that mean? "Sat" in this context refers to the manifest world, things that we can perceive with our mind and our senses. "Asat" refers to the unmanifest world comprising our subconscious desires or our vaasanas. In computer terms, Sat is the hardware and asat is the software, the programming stored in memory. Our behaviour is driven by the unmanifest programming of our desires, just like a computer behaves according to its programming.

So, if we were to describe electricity, it would be beyond the hardware and the software. Tiny electrical currents store the software in memory, and powerful electrical currents create the hardware in a factory. Another example we have come across is gold. Five grams of gold can make a necklace, or a bangle, or a biscuit. When the necklace is manifest, all the other shapes become unmanifest. But the gold transcends, it is beyond the manifest and the unmanifest. In the same way, Ishvara transcends the manifest and the unmanifest names and forms in this universe.

kasmaat : why
cha : and
te : you
na : not
nameran : they bow
mahaatman : O great one
gareeyase : most honourable
brahmanaha : Brahmaa
api : even
aadikartre : ancient creator
ananta : infinite
devesha : lord of lords
jagannivaasa : abode of the universe
tvam : you
aksharam : imperishable
sadasattatparam : beyond manifest and unmanifest
yat : what is

Bhagavad Gita Verse 38, Chapter 11

tvam aadidevaha purushaha puraanaastvamasya vishvasya param nidhaanam
 |
vettaasi vedyam cha param cha dhaama tvayaa tatam vishvamanantaroopam
 || 38 ||

You are the primal lord, the ancient person. This universe is your supreme abode. You are the knower, the knowable and the supreme abode. By you is this universe pervaded, O one with infinite forms.

Arjuna's understanding of Ishvara becomes clearer and clearer as this chapter unfolds. He acknowledges Ishvara's creative power by addressing him as "aadideva", the primal or first lord, the one who created Brahmaa, the creator. He also acknowledges that Ishvara has the power to create "anantaroopam", an infinite number of forms, which is what we experience as "vishwam", this magnificent universe. The first name of Ishvara in the Vishnu Sahasranaama, the thousand names of Vishnu, is vishwam.

Ishvara has not created the universe and stepped aside from it. He dwells in it as the ancient "purusha" or person, just like we dwell as the person in our body, the "city of nine gates" from the fifth chapter. Also, Ishvara is not located in just one specific area or corner of this universe. He is present everywhere. He is the "tatam" in the phrase "yenam sarvam idam tatam" from the second chapter. He pervades this entire creation, just like water pervades all ocean waves.

We know that even an inert object like a TV screen can conjure up an infinite number of names and forms. But Ishvara is far from inert. He is of the nature of awareness, of knowledge. He is the knower of everything that is to be known, all the forms that he has created. And when all these forms are dissolved, they end up in him, the final resting place, the "parama dhaama" or supreme abode.

tvam : you
 aadidevaha : primal lord
 purushaha : person
 puraanaaha : ancient
 tvam : you
 asya : this
 vishvasya : universe
 param : supreme
 nidhaanam : abode
 vettaa : knower
 asi : are
 vedyam : knowable
 cha : and
 param : supreme
 cha : and
 dhaama : abode
 tvayaa : by you
 tatam : pervaded
 vishvam : universe
 anantaroopam : having infinite forms

Bhagavad Gita Verse 39, Chapter 11

vayuryamognirvarunaha shashaankaha prajaapatistvam prapitaamahashcha
 |
namo namastestu sahastrakritvaha punashcha bhooyopi namo namaste || 39
 ||

You are Vayu, Yama, Agni, Varuna, Shashaanka, Prajaapati and Prapitaamaha. Salutations to you a thousand times. Salutations to you, again and again.

Arjuna understood that the source of nature's power was none other than Ishvara. He saw Ishvara in all the primal forces of nature and listed their presiding deities: Vayu, the lord of wind who sustains all living beings. Yama, the lord of death who ensures justice for everyone. Agni, the lord of fire who provides energy to all beings. Varuna, the lord of life-giving water. Shashaanka, the moon, who nourishes all plants and herbs.

How could Ishvara manifest as all these deities? Because Ishvara functions as Prajaapati, also known as Lord Brahmaa, creator of the universe who brought all the deities into existence. Vedic texts refer to Brahmaa as Hiranyagarbha, the golden womb that brought forth the universe. But Ishvara existed even before Brahmaa was created, he is the Prapitaamaha, the great-grandfather, the original person.

When we are humbled, when we come in the presence of someone who is infinitely more capable than we are, we could have one of two reactions. If we have no respect for that person, we could harbour feelings of resentment and anger. But in this case, Arjuna was humbled by Ishvara for whom he had the utmost reverence. Knowing that the source of the universe was on his side, all he could do was repeatedly prostrate and offer his salutations. Knowing that it was Ishvara who was doing his work all along, Arjuna's completely surrendered his pride.

vayuhu : Vayu
 yamaha : Yama
 agnihi : Agni
 varunaha : Varuna
 shashaankaha : Shashaanka
 prajaapatihi : Prajaapati
 tvam : you
 prapitaamaha : Prapitaamaha
 cha : and
 namaha : salutations
 namaha : salutations
 te : to you
 astu : let there be
 sahastrakritvaha : a thousand times
 punaha : again
 cha : and
 bhooyoha : again
 api : also
 namaha : salutations
 namaha : salutations
 te : to you

Bhagavad Gita Verse 40, Chapter 11

*namaha purastadatha prishtataste namostu te sarvata eva sarva |
anantaveeryaamitavikramastvam sarvam samaapnoshi tatosi sarvaha || 40*
||

Salutations to you from before and behind. Indeed, let there be salutations to you everywhere, O one with infinite power, O one with infinite valour. You pervade all, therefore you are everything.

Arjuna, wielder of Lord Shiva's Gaandiva bow, was universally regarded as one of the foremost archers of his time. So far, he thought that it was his might and power that was defeating the Kauravas. But now, after beholding the cosmic form, his pride had dropped completely. In this shloka, he acknowledged that his power and valour came from Ishvara, and that he was only the "nimitta", the instrument for channeling that power.

Now, we have seen ten chapters of the Gita. Each chapter is called a "yoga", because it takes us higher and higher in our spiritual journey if we can understand and implement its teaching. In the previous chapter, Shri Krishna wanted Arjuna to see the one Ishvara in all beings, to see unity in diversity. In this chapter, he wanted Arjuna to see all beings in that one Ishvara, to see diversity ultimately subsumed into unity. Shri Krishna's goal was fulfilled when Arjuna realized the truth expounded in the Upanishads, declaring here that Ishvara pervades everything, and that he ultimately is everything.

So when he recognized Ishwara as the infinite source of all power and valour, and in fact, the ultimate source and cause of everything, Arjuna could not help but repeatedly offer salutations to that cosmic form. But as we saw earlier, he had lost all notions of space and direction. He did not know what was north or south, or what was up or down. So giddy was his state of mind that he wanted to offer salutations to Ishvara from the front, back and all directions.

Offering our salutations to Ishvara, also known as "vandanam", is considered one of nine methods of worship. Shree Ramdas Samarth has devoted an entire section of the Dasbodh to describe the glories of vandanam. He considers it one of the simplest and most effective tools to connect with Ishvara. By its very nature, offering salutations or bowing to someone automatically eliminates our ahankaara, our ego, the

namaha : salutations
purastat : before
atha : and
prishtataha : behind
te : you
namaha : salutations
astu : may there be
te : you
sarvataha : everywhere
eva : indeed
sarvaha : all
anantaveerya : infinite power
amitavikramaha : infinite valour
tvam : you
sarvam : all
samaapnoshi : pervade
tataha : therefore
asi : you are
sarvaha : everything

Notes

1. Vandanam is elaborated in the fifth section of the fourth chapter of the Dasbodh.

primary obstacle to connecting with Ishvara.

Having understood the purpose of the cosmic form, Arjuna began to ask for Shri Krishna's forgiveness next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 41, Chapter 11

*sakheti matvaa prasabham yaduktam he krishna he yaadava he sakheti |
 ajaanataa mahimaanam tavedam mayaa pramaadaatpranayena vaaapi || 41
 ||*

Thinking of you as a friend, I addressed you rashly as O Krishna, O Yaadava, O friend. Not knowing your greatness, I said it in this manner out of carelessness or also out of affection.

Arjuna and Shri Krishna were childhood friends. Growing up together, Arjuna never realized the divine nature of Shri Krishna's birth. He had treated him as he would treat any other friend of his. Now, having understood his divine nature having viewed the cosmic form, he wanted to acknowledge his ill-treatment of Shri Krishna, and beg for forgiveness for all the times he had acted imprudently. After all he was Arjuna, whose name meant "one who is extremely straight-forward".

In Arjuna's time, just like in the present time, insults with respect to people's skin colour or caste were quite popular. Arjuna recounts his insults to Shri Krishna where he used to call him dark-skinned, refer to his caste, or call him a friend instead of a more respectable title. And like any of us, his intellect knew that insulting anyone was not the right thing to do, but he did it anyway. Knowing this well, Arjuna owned up to his ignorance, carelessness and rash behaviour.

But Arjuna also gave another side of the story. Although he did insult Shri Krishna out of carelessness in some instances, there were other instances when he did it out of sheer affection for his friend. When there is affection from both sides between friends, it is totally acceptable to insult each other. Arjuna was going to ask for forgiveness very soon, and hoped that Shri Krishna would keep this side of the story in his mind.

sakhaa : friend
 iti : in this manner
 matvaa : thinking
 prasabham : rashly
 yat : whatever
 uktam : said
 he : O
 krishna : Krishna
 yaadava : Yaadava
 ajaanataa : not knowing
 mahimaanam : greatness
 tava : your
 idam : this
 mayaa : I
 pramaadaat : in carelessness
 pranayena : in affection
 vaa : or
 api : also

Bhagavad Gita Verse 42, Chapter 11

*yacchaavahaasaarthamasatkritosi vihaarashayyasanabhojaneshu |
 ekothavaapyachyuta tatsamaksham tatksaamaye tvaamahamaprameyam | |
 42 | |*

Whatever insults were said to you in jest, while resting, sleeping, sitting, dining, O resolute one, while in solitude or in front of others, for all that, I ask your forgiveness, O immeasurable one.

Throughout the Gita, Shri Krishna repeatedly emphasized the importance of maintaining an attitude of equanimity, of sameness, to objects, situations and people that we encounter. He used phrases like "do not view a brahmin different than an outcaste", "view gold and clay as the same", "one who views friends, enemies and well wishers with the same vision is superior". But when Arjuna examined his past treatment of Krishna, he found that he did not live up to that standard.

Now that he had received the knowledge of equanimity from Shri Krishna, Arjuna wanted to confess his misbehaviour and ask for forgiveness from Shri Krishna. He acknowledged that his behaviour was purely driven by ignorance and jest. It is said in the Mahaabhaarata that Arjuna was fond of pulling pranks on Shri Krishna during their childhood days. He once pulled a chair on which Shri Krishna was about to sit. He wanted to reassure Shri Krishna that in all those pranks, he meant no malice whatsoever.

As he implored for forgiveness, Arjuna addressed Shri Krishna as "achyuta", one who never falls from his position, asserting that Shri Krishna's conduct was beyond reproach, that he practised what he preached. He also addressed him as "aprameyam", one who is so infinite that he cannot be measured. Forgiveness can only come from one who has a large heart. Confessing his wrongdoings to Shri Krishna enabled Arjuna to start with a clean slate and begin to follow his teachings.

yat : whatever
 cha : and
 avahaasaartham : said in jest
 asatkritaha : insults
 asi : happened
 bhojaneshu : dining
 ekaha : in solitude
 athavaa: or
 api : also
 achyuta : O resolute one
 tatsamaksham : in front of others
 tat : that
 kshaamaye : forgiveness
 tvaam : your
 aham : I
 aprameyam : O immeasurable one

Bhagavad Gita Verse 43, Chapter 11

*pitaasi lokasya charaacharasya tvamasya poojyashcha gururgareeyaan |
na tvatsamostyabhyadhikaha kutonyo lokatrayepyapratimaprabhaava || 43*
||

You are the father of this universe, of all that is moving and non-moving. You are most worthy of worship, and the greatest teacher among teachers. There is none like you. How could anyone be superior than you in all the three worlds, O one of immeasurable impact?

Arjuna describes the characteristics of an ideal parent in this shloka. Who is an ideal parent? Any parent should obviously provide physical and emotional nourishment to their children. But ideal parents also become the greatest gurus, the greatest teachers, for their children. Only when parents teach the right knowledge and values do they become worthy of being worshipped by their children. Symbolically speaking, Ishvara is the ideal parent because he is the ultimate cause of this universe that is made up of sentient and insentient objects.

Arjuna also refers to Ishvara as the ultimate overlord of the three worlds. Traditionally, we think of these three worlds as referring to heaven, hell and earth. Another meaning of the three worlds is the three states in which we exist. In the day, we exist in the waking state where our intellect, our faculty of logic and reason is active. In the night, we go into our dream state, where our intellect is shut off but our mind creates whole new dream worlds. We then go into a state of deep sleep, where neither the mind nor the intellect functions.

Though we keep going through all three states daily, the sense that "I exist" is common. The Mandukya Upanishad uses this analysis to reveal the nature of the eternal essence. In this shloka, Arjuna asserts that Ishvara is with us as the "I am" principle in all of these three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. To this great being, Arjuna surrenders his ego by declaring that there is nothing else in the entire universe like Ishvara.

pitaa : father
asi : is
lokasya : universe
charaacharasya : moving and non-moving
tvam : you
asya : are
poojyaha : worthy of worship
cha : and
guruhu : teacher
gareeyaan : teachers
na : not
tvatsamaha : like you
asti : is
abhyadhikaha : superior than
kutaha : how
anyaha : other
lokatraye : in the three worlds
api : also
apratimaprabhaava : unsurpassable impact

Bhagavad Gita Verse 44, Chapter 11

tasmaatpranamiya pranidhaaya kaayam prasaadaye tvaamahameeshameedyam
 |
piteva putrasya sakheva sakhyuhu priyaha priyaayaarhasi deva sodhum ||
 44 ||

Therefore, prostrating my body, bowing down, I beg you to be pleased, O Ishvara, worthy of worship. Like a father tolerates his son, a friend his friend, a lover his beloved, so should you tolerate (me), O Lord.

This shloka evokes an illustration from The Mundaka Upanishad of two birds sitting on the branch of a tree. The two birds are friends. One bird, symbolizing the human condition, is completely engrossed in enjoying the fruit of the tree. This bird doesn't realize that it has developed an attachment to the fruit, and that the fruit will eventually become the cause of its sorrow. Similarly, we do not realize that the more we get stuck in objects, the more the objects get stuck to us. The Gita has repeatedly pointed out this theme.

Now, the second bird on that branch symbolizes the Ishvara principle. It does not get attached to the fruit, it simply watches the show as a passive onlooker. The first bird is so engrossed in its sense enjoyments that it never pays attention to the second bird. Like Arjuna, and like all of us, the first bird is stuck in the delusion of the material world. The moment the first bird stops its indulgence and looks at the second bird, its bondage is snapped. Without the help of this Ishvara principle, we cannot extricate ourselves from the pull of the senses. For most of us, this Ishvara principle is our teacher, our guru.

So through this shloka, we are instructed to completely surrender ourselves in prostration to that Ishvara principle. When Arjuna undertook a "saashtaanga namaskaara", a total surrender of his body through prostration, he referred to SHri Krishna as his friend, recalling the illustration of the two birds who were friends. Arjuna asked for a father's forgiveness, a friend's forgiveness and the beloved's forgiveness - three categories of forgiveness since he wanted all of these from Shri Krishna.

tasmaat : therefore
 pranamiya : bow
 pranidhaaya : prostrating
 kaayam : body
 prasaadaye : pleased
 tvaam : you
 aham : I
 eesham : Ishvara
 eedyam : worthy of worship
 pitaa : father
 eva : like
 putrasya : son
 sakhaa : friend
 eva : like
 sakhyuhu : friend
 priyaha : lover
 priyaahaa : beloved
 arhasi : should
 deva : O Lord
 sodhum : tolerate

Bhagavad Gita Verse 45, Chapter 11

*adrishtapoorvam hrishitosmi drishtvaa bhayena cha pravyathitam mano me |
tadeva me darshaya devarooam praseeda devesha jagannivaasa || 45 ||*

Seeing you form that was never seen before, I am overjoyed and (yet) fearful, my mind is disturbed. Show me that divine form. Be pleased, O Lord of lords, O abode of the universe.

Fear is one of our most primal emotions. At some point or the other in our lives, we have encountered fear of losing our job, losing a loved one, fear of an angry confrontation, stage fright and so on. But we can boil all kinds of fear down to three things. First, the fear of losing something that is "ours". This is the fear of losing our life, our job, our loved ones and so on. Next is the fear of loss of knowledge, or being duped. Third is the fear of losing joy and happiness, fear of sorrow in other words. We can sum it up in this manner: we are afraid of losing our existence, knowledge and happiness.

However, if we recall the teaching of the Gita so far, especially from the second chapter, we know that our true nature is the *aatmaa*, the eternal essence which is infinite existence, knowledge and happiness. So then, the cause of fear is the ego, the delusion that we are not the eternal essence. There is no scope for fear when we know our true nature as the infinite eternal essence. But if we assume that "I am the body", then all the problems and fears of the body such as disease, old age, death etc become our problems. The fear of death, which is actually the fear of losing the existence of the body, becomes our fear.

So then, why did Arjuna fear Shri Krishna's cosmic form? For a brief moment, Arjuna's ego had vanished when he considered himself part and parcel of the cosmic form. When his ego came back, it brought with it all the incorrect associations with the body, mind and so on. Arjuna then saw the cosmic form as something outside of himself, something that could destroy him. He acknowledged his fear to Shri Krishna, begging him to go back to his original form.

adrishtapoorvam : prior unseen
hrishitaha : overjoyed
asmi : I am
drishtvaa : seeing
bhayena : fearful
cha : and
pravyathitam : disturbed
manaha : mind
me : my
tadeva : that
me : to me
darshaya : show
devarooam : divine form
praseeda : be pleased
devesha : O Lord of lords
jagannivaasa : O abode of the universe

Bhagavad Gita Verse 46, Chapter 11

*kireetinam gadinam chakrahastamicchhaami tvaam drishtumaham tathaiva |
tenaiva roopena chaturbhujena sahastrabaaho bhava vishvamoorte || 46 ||*

Wearing a crown, holding a mace, disc in hand, in that four-armed form do I wish to see you. O one with infinite arms, be that very form, O universal form.

Fearing Shri Krishna's terrible form, Arjuna begged Shri Krishna to transform back into his normal form. Terming a four-armed figure as a normal form may seem strange. We need to dig deeper into the symbolic aspect of the number four to understand this request properly. The number four has a deep significance in the scriptures, since it represents the four Vedas, the four Varnas or classes, the four aashramas or stages, and the four purusharthas or aims of life. As an example, let us explore the four aashramas.

A person is supposed to pass through four aashramas or stages during their life. They begin life under the instruction of a guru or teacher, with the sole aim of seeking knowledge. This stage is called brahmacharya. After graduating from their school, they then lead the life of a householder in the grihastha stage. When that is fulfilled, they enter into a stage where they begin to gradually renounce all material attachments. This is known as vaanaprastha. After complete renunciation, a person's life culminates in the sanyaasa stage where their sole aim is spiritual pursuits.

In this manner, we can uncover the significance behind several aspects of the number four. But what Arjuna really meant to convey to Shri Krishna was a request to assume the form that his admirers and devotees loved the most, the form that was the object of their meditation. This was Shri Krishna's form as Lord Naaraayana, which was the embodiment of peace and serenity, and a polar opposite of his rudra or terrible form that Arjuna wanted to go away.

kireetinam : wearing a crown
gadinam : holding a mace
chakrahastam : disc in hand
icchhaami : I wish
tvaam : you
drishtum : see
aham : I
tathaiva : like that
tenaiva : that very
roopena : form
chaturbhujena : with four arms
sahastrabaaho : O one with infinite arms
bhava : be
vishvamoorte : O universal form

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 47, Chapter 11**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:*

mayaa prasannena tavaarjunedam roopam param darshitamaatmayogaat |
tejomayam vishvamanantamaadyam yanme tvadanyena na drishtapoorvam
 || 47 ||

Shree Bhagavaan said: Being pleased, I have shown this supreme form to you, O Arjuna, with my power. My form is luminous, universal, infinite and primal, which no one except you has seen before.

Previously, Shri Krishna had displayed his "soumya roopa", the pleasant cosmic form, which was replaced by his "raudra roopa" his terror-inspiring form. Arjuna was extremely frightened when he saw it. Later, he acknowledged that he could not see it any more and begged Shri Krishna to stop showing it. In this shloka, Shri Krishna reassured Arjuna that there was no intent to scare Arjuna through the fearful form. It was only out of his compassion that the fearful cosmic form, a result of Ishvara's power of maaya, was displayed.

Like Arjuna, we may also want to know why this terrible form was displayed. From a practical standpoint, it is an illustrative reminder to view creation and destruction with equanimity in our lives. Most of us tend to get attached to pleasant and favourable circumstances, and reject or run away from unpleasant circumstances. Ishvara's universal form has room for both, and gives equal validity to both these aspects. Through this form. Shri Krishna wants us to view the same Ishvara in all aspects of life, pleasant and unpleasant.

Furthermore, Shri Krishna wanted to again caution us against objectifying this universal form, in other words, to think of ourselves as unique and distinct from it. We are part and parcel of that universal form, it is not outside us. To drive home this point, he summarizes the key aspects of this form. It is full of luster (tejomaya), it is that which is all pervading (vishwam), it is infinite (anantam), it is primal and beginningless (aadyam). He also points out the exclusivity of this form to Arjuna, which is elaborated in the next shloka.

mayaa : I have
 prasannena : being pleased
 tava : to you
 arjuna : Arjuna
 idam : this
 roopam : form
 param : supreme
 darshitama : have shown
 atmayogaat : with my power
 tejomayam : luminous
 vishvam : universal
 anantam : infinite
 aadyam : primal
 yat : which
 me : I
 tvadanyena : except you
 na : not
 drishtapoorvam : seen before

Bhagavad Gita Verse 48, Chapter 11

*na vedayajnyaadhyayanairna danairna cha kriyaabhirna tapobhirugraihi |
evamroopaha shakya aham nruloke drishtum tvadanyena kurupraveera || 48*
||

Not through Vedic studies, rituals, charity, actions nor severe penance can I be seen in this form in the human world by anyone than yourself, O foremost of the Kurus.

Shri Krishna taught the Gita to Arjuna during a time when most people confused the means with the end with regards to all things spiritual. We see this during our lifetime in the present day. To understand this, let us look at our pre-sleep rituals. We make the bed, we turn off the light, we lie down and close our eyes. Some of us read a book or listen to music afterwards. We know, however, that these are mere aids to encouraging sleep. If our body isn't ready to sleep, none of these aids will work.

Similarly, Shri Krishna says that moksha or liberation cannot be attained simply by studying the scriptures, or by performing elaborate rituals, charity or severe penance. All these prescriptions are helpful in purifying our mind, in purging it of selfishness and individuality. When our mind is immaculate through the disciplined observance of these prescriptions, it becomes fit to receive knowledge about the eternal essence through a qualified teacher. That is the only way by which we will realize the true nature of Ishvara and the eternal essence.

In most cases, we see people ardently take up different techniques of worship, penance, study and so on, but tend to get so attached to those techniques that they lose sight of the real goal which is liberation. They go so far as to claim the efficacy of one technique versus the other. Also, the eternal essence is our true nature and beyond the realm of action, as we saw in the second chapter. Nothing eternal can arise from action, as action always creates impermanent effects. Nothing that we create, or that nature has created, is eternal. Even the earth that outlives all of us will one day be destroyed. Therefore, Shri Krishna congratulates Arjuna by reminding him that it was only due to compassion that Arjuna could behold the universal form.

na : not
vedayajnyaadhyayanaihi : rituals and study of Vedas
na : not
danaihi : charity
na : not
cha : and
kriyaabhihi : with actions
na : not
tapobhihi : with penance
ugraihi : severe
evam : this
roopaha : form
shakyaha : possible
aham : I
nruloke : human world
drishtum : seen
tvadanyena : anyone but you
kurupraveera : foremost among the Kurus

Bhagavad Gita Verse 49, Chapter 11

*maa te vyathaa maa cha vimoodhabhaavo dristhvaa roopam ghorameedranga-
mamedam |
vyapetabheehee preetamanaahaa punastvam tadeva me roopamidam prapashya
|| 49 ||*

**Do not be disturbed, and do not be deluded on seeing that, my
frightful form. Be fearless, with a pleasant mind, behold again this
very form of mine.**

Knowing fully well that Arjuna's mind could not deal with the fear-inducing cosmic form, Shri Krishna asked Arjuna to not worry, and to remove all traces of fear. He reassured him that it was his friend, charioteer and companion all along, not some other person. Nothing had changed. He used the word "prapashya" meaning "behold", urging Arjuna not to look away, that the familiar form of Shri Krishna was on its way.

Unlike Arjuna, we have not seen the grand sweep and scale of the cosmic form. But, our daily life is part of that very universe, so whatever Shri Krishna says to Arjuna is also applicable to us. The terrors, the destructive forces in the universe usually create fear and agitation in our minds. Shri Krishna urges all of us to go about our lives with a fearless attitude and a pleasant mind, because he is present in everything. Only when we forget this fact will we create fear and agitation.

Ultimately, the root of all sorrow and fear is delusion, the confusion between right and wrong knowledge. In Arjuna's case, it was the delusion created by attachment to his relatives. In our case, it is our attachment to our body, to our possessions, to our family, our job, our position, the list goes on and on. Shri Krishna says "maa vimoodhabhaavaha", he urges all of us to cast our state of delusion away, and learn to see Ishvara in everything, and everything in Ishvara.

maa : do not
te : you
vyathaa : disturbed
maa : do not
cha : and
vimoodhabhaavaha : state of delusion
dristhvaa : seeing
roopam : form
ghoram : frightful
eedranga : such
mama : my
idam : this
vyapetabheehee : fearless
preetamanaahaa : pleasant mind
punaha : again
tvam : you
tadeva : that very
me : my
roopam : form
idam : this
prapashya : behold

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 50, Chapter 11**Sanjaya uvaacha:**ityarjunam vaasudevastathoktvaa svakam roopam darshayaamaasa bhooyaha**|**aashvaasayaamaasa cha bheetamenam bhootvaa punaha saumyavapoormahaat-
maa || 50 ||*

Sanjaya said:Then, having said this to Arjuna, Vaasudeva showed his form, and again assuming his pleasant form, reassured the scared one.

iti : this
arjunam : to Arjuna
vaasudevaaha : Vaasudeva
tathaa : in that manner
uktvaa : saying
svakam : his
roopam : form
darshayaamaasa : showed
bhooyaha : then
aashvaasayaamaasa : reassured
cha : and
bheetam : scared one
enam : this
bhootvaa : becoming
punaha : again
saumyavapuhu : pleasant form
mahaatmaa : great one

The eighth chapter in the tenth canto (book) of the Srimad Bhaagavatam describes the ceremony where the sage Garga, in the village of Gokula, gave Shri Krishna the name "Vaasudeva" to indicate that he was the son of Vasudeva. This ceremony was conducted in a low-key manner so as not to arouse the suspicion of the king Kamsa, who had vowed to finish the progeny of Vasudeva. Vaasudeva also means "one who pervades the universe".

The eight chapter further describes a story of Shri Krishna's pranks. Several children approached Yashoda to complain that her son, the baby Shri Krishna, was eating dirt. Angrily, she asked Shri Krishna to open his mouth so that she can know whether he was eating dirt. When he opened his mouth, Yashoda saw a glimpse of the cosmic form inside, with all the planets, galaxies, all of time and space in that tiny mouth. She did not see the fearful version of the cosmic form shown to Arjuna. Immediately afterwards, Shri Krishna erased her memory of this incident.

In this shloka, Sanjaya introduced himself in the commentary to indicate that Shri Krishna ended the fearful cosmic form, then assumed his four armed form, and then the pleasant two armed form that Arjuna knew and loved. Shri Krishna held a whip in one hand and the reins of the chariot in another. Just like a father scolds his children and immediately pacifies them, he pacified Arjuna and ensured that his state of mind returned to normal. This is reflected in the next shloka where the chanting meter also reverts back to the "anushtubh chandha", the default meter for chanting the Gita.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 51, Chapter 11**Arjuna uvaacha:**drishtvedam maanusham roopam tava saumyam janaardana |
idaaneemasmi samvrittaha sachetaahaa prakritim gataha || 51 ||*

drishtvaa : seeing
 idam : this
 maanusham : human
 roopam : form
 tava : your
 saumyam : pleasant
 janaardana : O Janaardana
 idaaneem : at this moment
 asmi : I have
 samvrittaha : become
 sachetaahaa : composed
 prakritim : my true nature
 gataha : attained

Arjuna said: Seeing this, your pleasant human form, O Janaardana, I have now regained my composure, and attained my true nature.

The pleasing form of Shri Krishna is glorified in the Srimad Bhaagavatam repeatedly. The cowherdesses of Vrindaavan known as the gopis, elaborately praise this form in the tenth canto of the Bhaagavatam. They say: "Your beauty makes all three worlds auspicious. Even the cows, birds, trees and deer are enthralled when they see your beautiful form." Arjuna, seeing the human form of Shri Krishna, regained his natural state, free from the fear and bewilderment resulting from the cosmic form.

We have come across the meaning of the term "Janaardana" earlier. "Arda" means one who moves, or makes others move. Jana means people, and therefore Janaardana means one who moves people to heaven or hell, in other words, dispenses justice to evildoers. Another meaning of Janaardana is one whom people ask for prosperity and well being. By addressing Shri Krishna as Janaardana, a term he used to address Shri Krishna prior to knowing that he was Ishvara, Arjuna recalled the glory of his human form.

So far, we saw Arjuna request Shri Krishna for the cosmic form, Arjuna's description of the cosmic form and his subsequent reaction to it, followed by a request to revert back to the human form. Now, Shri Krishna summarizes the teaching of this chapter in the the four shlokas that follow.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 52, Chapter 11**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**sudurdarshamidam roopam drishtvaanasi yanmama |
devaa apyasya roopasya nityam darshanakaankshinaha || 52 ||*

sudurdarsham: extremely rare to see
 idam : this
 roopam : form
 drishtvaan : seen
 asi : you have
 yat : that
 mama : mine
 devaaha : gods
 api : even
 asya : this
 roopasya : form
 nityam : eternally
 darshanakaankshinaha : long to see

Shree Bhagavaan said: It is extremely rare (for anyone) to see that form of mine that you have just seen. Even the gods eternally long to see this form.

The Gita uses a lot of the Katha Upanishad for its teachings. In that Upanishad, the young boy Nachiketa approaches the lord of death Yama for spiritual instruction. His most powerful question to Yama is : what happens to the soul after death. Yama tries to distract Nachiketa with boons of wealth and power, but fails. Eventually he responds : "Nachiketa, even the gods are even anxious to know the answer to this question, and have never been able to figure this out".

The same language is used by Shri Krishna in this shloka. He says that the gods have desired to see Ishvara's cosmic form since eternity, but have not been able to do so. It is "sudurdarsham", extremely difficult and rare to see, it is next to impossible. They may have seen Lord Naarayana in his four-armed form, but not the universal cosmic vision seen by Arjuna. And they will probably not see it in their lifetime.

Why is it the case the the gods cannot see this vision? Let's investigate the nature of gods. They may be more powerful than humans, but they are subject to the three gunaas like every other aspect of creation. Which means that they also are impelled by selfish desires. Even Indra, the king of the gods, starts plotting to remove anyone who has an eye on his throne. So what Shri Krishna means here is that humans, gods, demons, anyone who is part of this creation, will never get to see this cosmic form unless they have a specific quality. Shri Krishna will give a detailed answer to this question soon.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 53, Chapter 11

*naaham vedairna tapasaa na daanena na chejyayaa |
shakya evamvidho drishtum drishtvaanasi maam yathaa || 53 ||*

**Not through the Vedas, penance, charity, nor through worship can
I be seen, in the manner in which you have seen me.**

In this shloka, Shri Krishna lists tools that help us lead a fruitful life. First, he lists the Vedas, which refer to material and spiritual teachings, give us knowledge to lead a purposeful and ethical life. By encouraging action in life's early stages, then emphasizing renunciation in the later stages, they get us from harbouring selfish desires to desirelessness. Austerity and charity further reduce our ego, and penance strengthens us internally and externally. Worship invokes Ishvara's grace and blessings.

However, Shri Krishna reminds us that none of these methods will give us attainment of Ishvara as their result. This point is of such importance that he brings it up for the second time in the same chapter. Each of the means outlined above have their own results which are valid in life's various stages, but they can only purify us, not give us Ishvara directly. If we don't understand this, we are like the child who wants to go to a dentist not to take care of a tooth issue, but to get the lollipop at the end of the visit.

Attainment of Ishvara is purely in the hands of Ishvara himself, as we saw earlier. It is his choice as to whom he will bestow his grace upon. But so far, Shri Krishna himself has described that there is no bias in the way he has set up the machinery of the universe. This leads us to believe that Ishvara will not arbitrarily bestow his grace upon anyone randomly. There has to be a logic to it. Shri Krishna reveals this answer next.

na: not
aham : I
vedaihi : through Vedas
na : not
tapasaa : through penance
na : not
daanena : through charity
na : not
cha : and
ijyayaa : through worship
shakyaha : possible
evam : this
vidhaha : manner
drishtum : seen
drishtvaan : you seen
asi : have
maam : me
yathaa : like

Bhagavad Gita Verse 54, Chapter 11

*bhaktyaa tvananyayaa shakya ahamevavidhorjuna |
jnyaatum drishtum cha tattvena praveshtum cha parantapa || 54 ||*

bhaktyaa : devotion
tu : but
ananyayaa : single-pointed
shakyaha : accessible
aham : I
evam : this
vidhihi : manner
arjuna : O Arjuna
jnyaatum : known
drishtum : seen
cha : and
tattvena : essence
praveshtum : merged
cha : and
parantapa : O scorcher of foes

But, by single-pointed devotion, I am accessible, O Arjuna. In this manner, as my essence, I can be known, seen, and merged into, O scorcher of foes.

So finally, Shri Krishna reveals the means by which we can access Ishvara's cosmic form. It cannot be through any action such as rituals, study of the Vedas and so on since all of these methods are in the realm of space and time. "Ananya bhakti", or single-pointed devotion is the only means to access Ishvara. We have come across the term "ananya" in prior chapters. It means that in which there is no "anya", no other. We should not be devoted to Ishvara so that we can get something else. The devotion should be for obtaining Ishvara and nothing else.

We see this principle in our daily life as well. You have two friends, one who always comes to you when he needs something from you, not otherwise. Another friend comes to you just to know how you are doing, without any ulterior motive or hidden agenda. We would always prefer to deal with the second friend, and say to him "my house is your house, don't behave like a stranger, take what you want". Similarly, when we ask something materialistic from Ishvara, we treat him as different from us. Ishvara does not like this. When we want only Ishvara, we do not treat him as different from us. This is the crux of single-pointed devotion.

In the second half of the shloka, Shri Krishna outlines the process of attaining Ishvara. First, we have to know what Ishvara is, discarding all our prior notions. We have to know him as "tattvena", in his essence, as pervading the entire world, not as someone hiding up in the sky somewhere. When we gain this knowledge and reflect upon it constantly, we begin to see Ishvara in everything, and everything as Ishvara. But the last step, of not seeing Ishvara from the outside, but of totally merging into Ishvara, can only happen through single-pointed devotion. Arjuna came to know Ishvara through Shri Krishna's teaching, and he also saw Ishvara's cosmic form. But he did not fully merge into it, he was standing out of it.

In this manner, Shri Krishna slowly brings up the topic of the next chapter, which is the yoga of bhakti or devotion. He summarizes this chapter in the next and last shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 55, Chapter 11

*matkarmakrinmatparamo madbhaktaha sangavarjitaha |
nirvairaha sarvabhooteshu yaha sa maameti paandava || 55 ||*

One who performs actions for me, considers me as supreme, is devoted to me, is free from attachment and without enmity towards all beings, that person attains me, O Paandava.

matkarmakrit : performs actions for me
matparamaha : considers me as
supreme
madbhaktaha : devoted to me
sangavarjitaha : free from attachment
nirvairaha : without enmity
sarvabhooteshu : towards all beings
yaha : one who
saha : that person
maam : me
eti : attains
paandava : O Paandava

What do we get as a reward for studying one of the longest chapters of the Gita? It is this concluding shloka of the eleventh chapter which Shankaraachaarya considers the essence of the entire Bhagavad Gita. Shri Krishna says that Isvara can be attained by following five guidelines : perform actions for the sake of Ishvara, fix Ishvara as the ultimate goal, observe single-pointed devotion to Ishvara, remain free from worldly attachments, do not harbour likes or dislikes.

We have come across these themes throughout the Gita, but this is the first time that Shri Krishna reveals how they come together as a logical whole. First, he advises us to follow karma yoga, to perform selfless actions by dedicating them to Ishvara. He then advises us to fix Ishvara as the ultimate goal. This is the yoga of knowledge or jnyaana yoga. But we need something that propels us from karma yoga to jnyaana yoga. That is revealed as the third step, the yoga of devotion or bhakti yoga. None of these steps can be accomplished with a mind filled with the impurities of likes and dislikes that generate material attachment. These are addressed in fourth and fifth steps which are freedom from worldly attachments as well as from likes and dislikes.

Furthermore, all five steps are interconnected and strengthen each other. The mind cannot fully detach itself from everything. Like a child that drops attachment to toys and is attached to higher ideals as an adult, Shri Krishna advises us to drop attachments to material things and develop attachment for Ishvara. When we begin to see everything as Ishvara, and see ourselves as part of Ishvara, we will not generate feelings of dislike towards anyone or anything, just like we do not have enmity towards any part of our own body. This is the theme of this chapter, where the individual essence sees itself as part of the universal eternal essence.

om tatsatiti shreematbhagavatgitasupanishadsu brahmavidyaayaam yogashaastre shreekrishnaarjunsamvade vishwaroopadarshanayogo naama ekadashod-

hyaayaha || 11 ||

Summary of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 11

All of us know that even the largest tree came from a tiny seed. But our eyes cannot see the miniscule changes that transform the seed into a sapling, then into a plant and so on. Only when we take a series of photographs each day and play them at high speed can we actually see the seed turn into a tree. Our other senses have similar limitations. The mind, which gives meaning to the information from our senses, chops up time and space. It can never view the unity of things.

Arjuna was aware of this limitation. Having heard about Ishvara's vibhootis or grand expressions in the prior chapter, he desperately wanted to get rid of this limitation. In response to his request, Shri Krishna granted him divine vision that enabled him to see the universe without the limitations of space and time. Without the limitation of time, Arjuna did not just see the tree, he saw the seed, the sapling and the tree all at once. Without the limitation of space, he saw not just that tree, but all the trees in the universe all at once.

Our mind has another limitation. It tends to get attracted to some things, and gets repelled from other things. To highlight this limitation, Shri Krishna first showed Ishvara's pleasant form, and then followed it with his frightful, menacing form. Everything that existed in the pleasant form was violently destroyed by the same Ishvara. Shri Krishna later emphasized that creation and destruction were to be viewed in the same light, because creation cannot happen without destruction. Both have their place in the universe. Also, when one's actions or karmas are exhausted on earth, they are destroyed. There is no randomness or personal bias in who gets destroyed.

Shri Krishna concluded this chapter by instructing Arjuna on how to attain Ishvara. The key qualification is ananya bhakti, or single-pointed devotion. Combined with karma yoga, jnyana yoga, subduing likes and dislikes and giving up attachment to the material world, we are able to access Ishvara in his cosmic form. The previous shloka enabled us to see the one Ishvara in everything, the one in all. This chapter urges us to see the all in one.



Bhakti Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 12**Arjuna uvaacha:**evam satatayuktaa ye bhaktaastvaam paryupaasate |
ye chaapyaksharamavyaktam tesham ke yogavittamaahaa || 1 ||*

Arjuna said: Those devotees, constantly united in you, worship you, and those devotees who worship the imperishable, the unmanifest, between them, who is the superior knower of yoga?

evam : in this manner
satatayuktaa : constantly united
ye : those who
bhaktaahaa : devotees
tvaam : you
paryupaasate : worship you
ye : those who
cha : and
api : also
aksharam : imperishable
avyaktam : unmanifest
tesham : between them
ke : who is
yogavittamaahaa : superior knower of
yoga

The first chapter of the Gita addressed the confusion of Arjuna arising out of his lack of identity, and of not knowing his duty on the battlefield. Chapters two to five explained what is the true nature of the individual, and using karma yoga to purify oneself. Chapter six explained how to remain constantly in one's true nature through the yoga of meditation. Chapters seven to ten gave us an elaborate description of Ishvara, culminating with the vision of the cosmic form in the eleventh chapter.

The theme of this chapter is bhakti yoga, the yoga of devotion to Ishvara. Throughout the Gita, Shri Krishna has said, "perform actions for me", "become devoted to me", "make me your supreme goal". But we have to first know, who is this "me" that is to be worshipped? There are some places in the Gita where Shri Krishna has described himself as imperishable, unmanifest, not visible to our senses. Conversely, he has shown his visible cosmic form to Arjuna in the previous chapter. In India, most devotees worship images of their chosen deities in their homes and temples.

So then, Arjuna wants to know, who is the superior devotee? Is it the one who worships the unmanifest, or is it one who worships the manifest? There is a well-known Marathi bhajan (devotional song) that asks the very same question : do I call you saguna or nirguna? Saguna means one with attributes, one that can be seen and felt. Nirguna means one that has no attributes. It is a tough choice for Shri Krishna. He answers the question in the next shloka.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 12**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**mayyaveshya mano ye maam nityayuktaa upaasate |**shraddhayaa parayopetaaste me yuktatamaa mataahaa || 2 ||*

Shree Bhagavaan said: Those who, fixing their mind in me, are constantly engaged in my worship, endowed with supreme faith, those are superior in yoga, in my opinion.

mayi : in me
 aaveshya : fixing
 manaha : mind
 ye : those who
 maam : my
 nityayuktaa : constantly engaged
 upaasate : worship
 shraddhayaa : with faith
 parayaa : supreme
 upetaahaa : endowed
 te : those
 me : my
 yuktatamaahaa : superior in yoga
 mataahaa : opinion

Previously, Arjuna had asked Shri Krishna to select which type of devotees were better between those who worship Ishvara as the formless unmanifest, and those who worship him as an entity endowed with form. Shri Krishna begins by describing those devotees who worship Ishvara endowed with form. He says that such devotees are the most superior yogis because they are constantly engaged in worship of Ishvara, full of supreme faith.

Three qualities of a superior yoga are highlighted here. Firstly, we as devotees should be able to fix our mind on Ishvara, using all the instruction given in chapter six and other places as well. In the initial stages of meditation, keeping our mind on Ishvara even for ten minutes is quite an achievement. Secondly, we have to be "nitya yuktaa", the ability to remain constantly engaged in worship, without letting the mind divert itself to other pursuits. Thirdly, we need to be endowed with supreme and unwavering faith.

Even though these qualities may seem easy to attain on the surface, they are not so. Shri Krishna chooses words that indicate that he is looking for the highest kind of concentration and faith. For example, he uses the word "aaveshya" to describe concentration, but what it really means is using our thoughts to enter, to penetrate into the object of concentration. This kind of concentration requires a highly purified mind, free from selfish likes and dislikes and from attachment to material concerns. Our degree of faith further reinforces the ability to remain focused on our object of concentration.

So then, what is Shri Krishna's opinion on those devotees who worship Ishvara as the unmanifest? This comes next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 12

*ye tvaksharamanirdeshyamavyaktam paryupaasate |
satvatragamachintyam cha kootashtamachalam dhruvam || 3 ||*

And, those who steadfastly worship the imperishable, indefinable, all pervading, inconceivable, unchangeable, immovable and eternal.

In response to Arjuna's question, Shri Krishna earlier described the seeker who worshipped Ishvara as "saguna", an entity with form. In this and the next shloka, he described the seeker who worships the "nirguna", the formless Ishvara. Shri Krishna wants to clearly differentiate the formless from the formful, so he provides a list of adjectives to describe the formless Ishvara, to the extent that it is possible to do so.

"Aksharam" refers to that which does not decay, that which is imperishable. The seeker negates everything that he encounters as perishable, so only the subject remains. "Anirdeshyam" is that which cannot be described or defined by the speech and mind. "Avyaktam" refers to anything that is not accessible to our senses, something that is invisible. "Sarvatragam" is that which is not limited by space, that which pervades everywhere and everything. "Achintyam" is that which cannot be conceived as a thought by the mind.

Anything that is filled with fault is called "koota". So that by which the defect-ridden maaya and its activities look real is called "kootastha", the foundation or base on which maaya appears. "Kootastha" also means anvil which denotes changelessness in time. "Achalam" refers to fixity, changelessness in space. "Dhruvam" is that which is eternal and deathless. In this manner, a seeker worships the formless Ishvara.

Let us also understand what is meant by "upasaanaa" or meditative worship, since that is the theme of this chapter. Shankaracharya gives a long definition in his commentary. Upaasanaa literally means to sit near. Here it refers to the seeker taking on the quality of the object of worship by moving his mind as near to that object as he can. The object of worship should be selected with the advice of the guru and scriptures. It should not be arbitrary. Then the seeker should continuously think about the object, just like an unbroken stream of oil poured from a height.

ye : those who
tu : and
aksharam : imperishable
anirdeshyam : indefinable
avyaktam : unmanifest
paryupaasate : steadfastly worship
satvatragam : all pervading
achintyam : inconceivable
cha : and
kootashtam : unchangeable
achalam : immovable
dhruvam : eternal

Shri Krishna continues the description of nirguna upasakaas, seekers of the formless Ishvara, in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 12

*sanniyamyendriyagraamam sarvatra samabuddhayaha |
te praapnuvanti maameva sarvabhootahite rataahaa || 4 ||*

sanniyamya : having restrained
indriyagraamam : all the senses
sarvatra : everywhere
samabuddhayaha : balanced intellect
te : they
praapnuvanti: attain
maam : me
eva : alone
sarvabhootahite : welfare of all beings
rataahaa : revel

Having restrained all the senses, keeping a balanced intellect everywhere, revelling in the welfare of all beings, they attain me alone.

Imagine that our parents have asked us to come to their house. They are hosting an event and need our help. What will our attitude towards our assignment be? We will not hesitate to play the role of a cook, a waiter, a driver, a handyman, a dishwasher and so on. We will do whatever it takes to make that event a success. The well-being of all the guests will become our primary goal. We will set aside any personal differences with any guests because we are representing our parents at that event. We do all of this because we have a sense of oneness with our parents.

The devotee who worships the imperishable and unmanifest Ishvara has the same attitude. Just like we do not consider our parents as somebody distinct from us, the devotee does not consider Ishvara as separate from him. When there is no separation, there is no expectation of asking for anything or receiving anything. You only ask and receive when you consider someone different from you. We would never think of asking permission for every little thing from parents at that event, because it would be silly to do so.

Furthermore, such a devotee loses all sense of selfishness. He revels in the welfare of everyone in this world, "sarva bhoota hite rataahaa". Nothing ever destabilizes his mind or his intellect, because he sees himself as one with everything. His senses have stopped harbouring likes and dislikes, because they no longer cut up the world into "good" or "bad". He has very naturally "merged" into Ishvara, which is the final goal of devotion or bhakti. Shri Krishna echoes this point by saying "te praapnuvanti maam eva", they attain me alone.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 12

*kleshodhikatarasteshaamavyaktaasaktachetasaam |
avyakta hi gatirduhkham dehavadbhiravaapyate || 5 ||*

There is greater trouble for those whose minds are attached to the unmanifest. For, the path of the unmanifest is difficult to attain by the embodied.

kleshaha : trouble
adhikataraha : greater
teshaam : for those
avyaktaasaktachetasaam : mind at-
tached to unmanifest
avyakta : unmanifest
hi : for
gatihi : path
duhkham : difficult
dehavadbhihi : the embodied
avaapyate : attain

We used the example of children helping their parents organize a family event to understand the previous shloka. Now let us imagine that the CEO of the company we work for has asked us to attend an event at his house. What would be our attitude here? We would be on our best behaviour, and try our best to impress him with our actions. We would always ask for permission if we need to use anything in the CEO's house. We would also be on the lookout for others who are trying to impress him, and perhaps try to be one step ahead of them.

Although we look different than our parents, we feel no sense of difference from them. However, we see a difference between the title of the CEO and our title which could be software engineer, manager and so on. Similarly, Shri Krishna says that the one who is "deha vad" or embodied, the one who still has attachment to the notion that "I am Mr. so and so with a 5 feet 7 inch body, working for XYZ corporation", such a person will always have a tinge of separation from Ishvara.

So for the majority of us who want to become devotees, it is "adhikatar klesha", quite difficult to worship Ishvara in his formless aspect. Our sense of attachment to the body creates a sort of wall, a kind of separation between the devotee and Ishvara. We are carrying conditionings of several lifetimes, perhaps, that prevent us from accessing Ishvara in his formless aspect. Extreme vairagya or detachment is required for this. Does it mean that our spiritual journey ends here? Shri Krishna addresses this next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 6, Chapter 12

*ye tu sarvaani karmaani mayi sanyasya matparaahaa |
ananyenaiva yogena maam dhyaayanta upaasate || 6 ||*

But, those renounce all actions in me, intent upon me only, meditate upon me through the single-pointed yoga of worship..

ye : those
tu : but
sarvaani : all
karmaani : actions
mayi : me
sanyasya : renounce
matparaahaa : intent upon me
ananyena : single-pointed
eva : only
yogena : through yoga
maam : me
dhyaayanta : meditating
upaasate : worship

Previously, Shri Krishna compared seekers who worship the formless Ishvara to those who worship Ishvara with form, and concluded that the worshippers of the formless Ishvara have more difficulty. We used the example of a child helping his parents to understand the attitude of the formless worshipper and the example of the worker helping his CEO exemplifying the worshipper of Ishvara with form. Now Shri Krishna re-emphasizes the qualifications of the worshipper of Ishvara with form, which is the route that most of us will take.

First, we have to renounce all our actions to Ishvara, in other words, practice karma yoga. Typically, when we perform any actions, we are looking for a tangible material result (monetary profit), emotional result (happiness) or an intellectual result (satisfaction). If our actions don't turn out as we anticipated, we may get opposite results in the form of loss, sorrow or dissatisfaction. When we perform actions for the sake of renunciation to Ishvara, we leave the outcome to Ishvara, whether it is favourable or not.

When we do this, our mind and intellect do not constantly get destabilized by life's ups and downs, leaving them free to contemplate the higher goal of Ishvara. But this can only happen through the practice of single-pointed worship, "ananya yoga", the yoga where there is no other goal but Ishvara. In this manner, when we constantly worship Ishvara through our body, mind and intellect, he takes care of us. How does he do that? Shri Krishna completes this thought in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 12

*teshaamaham samuddhartaa mrityusansaarasaagaraat |
bhavaami nachiraatpaartha mayyaaveshitachetasaam || 7 ||*

**For them, whose minds are fixed in me, I immediately become their
uplifter from samsaara, the ocean of death, O Paartha.**

teshaam : for them
aham : I
samuddhartaa : uplifter
mrityusansaarasaagaraat : the ocean of
death samsaara
bhavaami : become
nachiraat : immediately
paartha : O Paartha
mayi : in me
aaveshita : fixed
chetasaam : mind

As a result of losing a wager, the eagle-winged Garuda and his mother Vinata were forced into enslavement by the Kadru, mother of serpents. Garuda promised to bring the nectar of immortality from heaven and give it to the serpents in exchange for his mother's freedom. Once the nectar was delivered, Lord Indra took it back to heaven, but spilt a few drops on a kind of grass known as dharba. The serpents tried to lick the nectar on the grass, but spilt their tongue doing so. As a result, all serpents have forked tongues even to this day.

Let us now look into the symbolic meaning of this story from the Puraanaas. The world comprises of objects that are a two things at once: naamaroopa (name and form) and Ishvara. The Ishvara in us wants to contact the Ishvara in those objects, but we make the mistake of letting our senses rush after the name and form aspects of the objects. We are like the serpents that really want nectar, but chase the dharba grass and cut ourselves in the process. Chasing of objects in the belief that they will give us joy, and receiving sorrow instead of joy, this is samsaara. Repeatedly chasing objects ensures that the cycle of birth and death continues.

In the Indian tradition, samsaara is referred to as an ocean in which most people are stuck until their death, only to be reborn again. Shri Krishna says that those devotees who worship Ishvara with form and meet the qualifications listed in the previous shloka are saved from samsaara by Ishvara himself. Unlike most material endeavours that take a long time, this process is "nachiraat" or swift. The key condition is that we have to think of Ishvara as the ultimate goal and nothing else. This is "saguna upasaana", worship of Ishvara with form, in a nutshell.

Now, Shri Krishna enumerates the types of yogas or practices through which we can attain Ishvara.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 12

mayyeva mana aadhatsva mayi buddhim niveshaya |
nivasishyasi mayyeva ata oordhvam na sanshayaha || 8 ||

Fix your mind only in me, place your intellect in me, thereafter you will dwell in me only, no doubt.

mayi : in me
 eva : only
 manaha : mind
 aadhatsva : fix
 mayi : in me
 buddhim : intellect
 niveshaya : place
 nivasishyasi : you will dwell
 mayi : in me
 eva : only
 ataha : this
 oordhvam : after
 na : no
 sanshayaha : doubt

In this series of four shlokas, Shri Krishna prescribed four paths or yogas to attaining Ishvara, each one more easier than the previous one. This shloka describes the path of jnyaana yoga or the yoga of knowledge. Shri Krishna says that the seeker should fix both his intellect and mind in Ishvara constantly, without any interruption. When this happens, that attainment of Ishvara is guaranteed. There is no room for "sanshaya" or doubt of attaining Ishvara when one practices jnyaana yoga. But doing so is not easy.

As a new year approaches, many of us start making new year resolutions such as losing weight, giving up a bad habit, cleaning the house and so on. It is our buddhi or intellect that sets firm long-term goals, targets and resolutions. Ultimately all types of plans and resolutions stem from our desires to achieve something in this world. Now, Jnyaana yoga requires us to have just one resolution and nothing else: to merge with Ishvara. But as we have seen in the second chapter, our stock of desires influences our intellect to make innumerable resolutions. This multitude of resolutions makes jnyaana yoga difficult.

Furthermore, our condition is such that it is not just the intellect that has many resolutions. The mana, our faculty of mind, is fickle to begin with due to the distractions of the senses. Jnyaana yoga requires the fixing of both the intellect and the mind onto Ishvara. It is in rare instances that we can achieve intellectual and mental harmony, such as studying for an exam, where we know that the stakes are high. But even that happens for a few minutes or a few hours at most.

So clearly, jnyaaya yoga, the foremost type of yoga, is difficult for most of us, atleast at our current stage of spiritual evolution. Is there something easier? Shri Krishna answers next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 9, Chapter 12

*atha chittam samaadhaatum na shaknoshi mayi sthiram |
 abhyaasayogena tato maamicchaaaptum dhananjaya || 9 ||*

atha : if
 chittam : mind
 samaadhaatum : establish
 na : not
 shaknoshi : able
 mayi : in me
 sthiram : steadfastly
 abhyaasayogena : yoga of repeated
 practice
 tataha : then
 maam : me
 icchaa : seek
 aaptum : attain
 dhananjaya : O Dhananjaya

If you are unable to steadfastly establish your mind in me, then seek to attain me through the yoga of repeated practice, O Dhananjaya.

A student of music does not become a maestro overnight. While watching a concert, we may admire how easily he can handle complex passages on the piano, but we know that the prowess is a result of years, maybe even decades, of repeated practice. In his book "Outliers", author Malcolm Gladwell emphasizes the "10,000 hour rule". The key to success in any field is a matter of practising a task for 10,000 hours. Here, Shri Krishna says that if we are unable to constantly fix our mind in Ishvara, we should set aside some time daily and practice doing so.

In the sixth chapter, Arjuna admits to Shri Krishna that it is very difficult for someone to keep their mind in Ishvara all the time, and asks for a solution to this problem. There as well, Shri Krishna recommends the technique of "abhyaasa" or repeated practice. In this technique, we first choose an object of worship such as the image of a deity, a spiritual text or a mantra. Then, following the instructions in the sixth chapter, we set aside a fixed time and place every day to meditate upon the object of worship. Whenever our thoughts stray away, we gently bring them back so that we are only thinking about the object of worship. This yoga is known as raaja yoga, ashtaanga yoga or dhyaana yoga.

Note that abhyaasa is not possible without its counterpart vairagya or dispassion towards the material world. Without reducing our stock of material desires, it is virtually impossible to sit in meditation. Each vaasanaa, each unfulfilled desire has the potential to produce a series of thoughts in our mind. When we sit for meditation, these unfulfilled desires start competing with each other to produce thoughts that distract us from the object of worship. Therefore, Shri Krishna advises us to follow abhyaasa and vairagya together.

Now, with the practice of dhyaana yoga, we only think of Ishvara for a brief period of time each day. How should we continue our spiritual practice throughout the rest of the day? Or, our stock of desires may not even let us sit in one place. Then how should we worship Ishvara?

Shri Krishna addresses this next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 12

*abhyaasepyasamarthosi matkarmo paramo bhava |
 madarthamapi karmaani kurvansiddhimavaapsyasi || 10 ||*

If you are incapable even to perform repeated practice, then perform actions for me. Even by doing actions for me, you shall attain success.

abhyaase : repeated practice
 api : even
 asamarthaha : incapable
 asi : are
 matkarmaparamaha : perform actions
 for me
 bhava : become
 madartham : for me
 api : also
 karmaani : actions
 kurvan : doing
 siddhim : success
 avaapsyasi : attain

So far, Shri Krishna recommended jnyaana yoga, followed by abhyaasa yoga, both of which are difficult for us to follow. Our stock of desires prevents us from pursuing even a few hours of daily meditation. We cannot sit still in one place. If we do so, we get distracted every so often. And even if we are able meditate, we still need to remain attuned to Ishvara for the majority of the day when we are not meditating. How do we achieve this? It is through the yoga of devotion, bhakti yoga.

Prahlaada, son of the king of demons and one of the greatest devotees of Lord Vishnu, was asked by his father Hiranyakashipu about what he had learned in school. He replied that one should serve Ishvara by making every act into an act of worship. Shravana refers to the constant listening of Ishvara's glories; kirtanam is the singing the names of Ishvara; smaranam refers to constant remembering of Ishvara; paadasevanam is adoring Ishvara's feet; archanam is worshipping Ishvara in temples or in our own homes; vandanam is the offering prayers; daasyam is to consider ourselves as servants of Ishvara; sakhyam: considering ourselves as friends of Ishvara; and finally, aatmanivedana where we completely offer ourselves to Ishvara.

What happens when we lead our life this way? When every action including our work in the office, our chores at home, our studies in school and our dealings with friends and family becomes an act of worship, we slowly erode our sense of doership or agentship. Instead of acting with the notion "I am doing this", we begin to act with the notion "Ishvara is doing everything". We submit our ego into the altar of Ishvara. As our sense of ego dissolves, we become qualified to practice abhyaasa yoga, and ultimately, jnyaana yoga. So therefore, incorporating Ishvara into every aspect of our lives is bhakti yoga.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 12

*athaitadapyashaktosi kartum madyogamaashritaha |
sarvakarmaphalatyaagam tataha kuru yataatmavaan || 11 ||*

**If, even doing this is not possible, then take refuge in my yoga;
cast off the fruits of all actions, with self control.**

In explaining the law of karma or action, Shri Krishna uses the term "fruit" to denote the result of an action. We know from basic physics that every action must result in a reaction, it must give a result. This result can be material (money), emotional (joy) or intellectual (satisfaction). By calling it a fruit, Shri Krishna reminds us that every result contains the seed of a future action hidden within it. This seed can give rise to innumerable actions, which can give rise to innumerable seeds, and so on and so forth.

How does that seed germinate into an action? If we eat a delicacy for the first time, our tastebuds send a signal to our ego which says "this delicacy is tasty". The ego then says "I like this delicacy, it makes me happy, therefore I shall have it again". The delicacy contained the seed of desire, but the ego made the delicacy into a source of happiness, paving the way for future actions towards acquiring that delicacy.

This is the condition of a majority of seekers. We are so tied up in the material world that we find it difficult to go beyond the satisfaction of our ego. We cannot bring bhakti or devotion into our lives like Shri Krishna prescribed in the previous shloka. Our primary desires are material, not spiritual. For seekers in this condition, Shri Krishna gives two simple suggestions: submit the results of actions to him, and control the senses as much as possible.

So if we eat a delicacy for the first time, our taste buds will definitely say that it is tasty. But instead of letting the ego say "this delicacy is tasty", we can say "I submit this lovely taste to Ishvara, may he enjoy it". The ego does not get a chance to assert itself, and in this manner the seed of future action is destroyed on the spot. Conversely, if we are studying for an exam and are worried about the result, we can say "I submit the result of this exam to Ishvara, good or bad". This will eliminate constant worrying and the consequent stress caused by it, leaving our mind free to study efficiently.

atha : if
etat : this
api : even
ashaktaha : not possible
asi : is
kartum : doing
madyogam : my yoga
aashritaha : take refuge
sarvakarmaphalatyaagam : cast off the
fruits of all actions
tataha : then
kuru : do
yataatmavaan : self control

Shri Krishna also asks us to control our mind and our senses. Both our mind and our senses have a natural affinity for sense objects. If we leave them unchecked, they will start brooding over sense objects and develop an attachment towards them. The second chapter had explained how this happens in great detail. So therefore, checking our senses and our mind will reduce the inflow of selfish desires to a great extent, and submission of results to Ishvara will transfer our enjoyership from our ego to Ishvara. This is karma yoga, the most simple and basic spiritual technique that takes us one step closer to Ishvara.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 12

*shreyo hi jnyaanamabhyaasaanjnyaanaaddhyaanam vishishyate |
dhyanaatkarmaphalatyaagastyagaacchaantiranantaram || 12 ||*

Knowledge is superior to practice, meditation is superior to knowledge, and renunciation of fruits of actions is superior to meditation, for peace immediately follows renunciation.

shreyaha : superior
hi : for
jnyaanam : knowledge
abhyaasaat : practice
jnyaanaat : knowledge
dhyaanam : meditation
vishishyate : superior
dhyanaat : meditation
karmaphalatyaagaha : renunciation of
fruits of action
tyaagaat : renunciation
shantihi : peace
anantaram : immediately follows

The last four shlokas laid out a series of stages that enable us to access Ishvara based on our qualifications. They were laid out in descending order, addressing the most qualified to the least qualified. Jnyaana yoga was prescribed for those who have given up attachment to the body, abhyaasa yoga for those who can sit for meditation, bhakti yoga for those who can perform every action for Ishvara, and karma yoga for those who can dedicate the results of their actions to Ishvara.

Here, Shri Krishna provides a recap of those four shlokas as well as providing some additional insights into the nuances of each stage. He first says that knowledge is superior to practice. Here, practice refers to mere mechanical chanting of japas without the involvement of the mind or the intellect. Such inert practice will not lead us anywhere. Shri Krishna cautions us against jumping into meditative practice without the knowledge of what we are doing, how to do it, what is the goal and so on.

Next, he says that meditation is superior to knowledge. Here, the word meditation is used in the sense of a higher kind of knowledge, one that does not create a distinction between the knower and the known, one that is a direct, intuitive understanding of Ishvara. This higher kind of knowledge is superior than dry, academic knowledge gained through a cursory reading of the scriptures without the guidance of a guru, and without the perfect internalization of that knowledge through a pure mind and intellect. In this sense, meditation or higher knowledge is superior to purely academic knowledge.

Now to get to these two stages, we have to take stock of our qualifications. Shri Krishna knew that the majority of people would have a great sense of attachment to the body, as well as a large stock of selfish desires that prompt them to selfish actions. They need a technique that is appropriate for their qualifications, and that will bring them to a stage where they can eventually practice meditation. For

such individuals, renunciation of the fruits of actions, or karma yoga, is superior than meditation. Only renunciation will bring short term peace through reduction of worry for the future, and long term peace by making us qualified for meditation.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 12

*adveshta sarvabhootaanaam maitraha karuna eva cha |
nirmamo nirahankaaraha samaduhkhasukhaha shamee || 13 ||*

He who is without dislike towards all beings, who is friendly and compassionate, who is also without (the sense of) mineness and egoism, who is the same in sorrow and joy, who is forgiving...

adveshta : without dislike
sarvabhootaanaam : all beings
maitraha : friendly
karunaha : compassionate
eva : also
cha : and
nirmamaha : without mineness
nirahankaaraha : without egoism
samaduhkhasukhaha : same in sorrow and joy
shamee : forgiving

Shri Krishna always elaborates on the practical aspects of his teaching and brings it to the level of the student's understanding. In the second chapter, he devoted several shlokas to describe the traits towards aspects of one who is established in the eternal essence. Here, he describes the traits of saints and accomplished devotees towards other people, which are easier for us to connect with, and become goals for people like us to strive towards.

An accomplished devotee essentially is convinced of two things: that everything in this world is not different than Ishvara, and that the devotee himself is also not different from Ishvara. When he has this outlook, he loses all sense of "I-ness" and "mine-ness". He never believes that he exists outside of the existence of Ishvara. There is no sense of "I"-ness because only one "I" - Ishvara - exists. There is no sense of possession because everything belongs to Ishvara. It is somewhat similar to the outlook one has towards a large family.

So when there is such a universal sense of oneness with everything, the devotee becomes extremely friendly towards everyone. There is no sense of dislike or hatred present in him towards those who oppose him. Instead, he instantly forgives everyone. He is compassionate towards those who are in need. When all sense of duality is gone, the mind does not get agitated in sorrowful situations, nor does it get excited in joyful situations. It maintains a sense of equanimity.

This partial shloka continues next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 12

*santushtaha satatam yogee yataatmaa dridhanishchayaha |
mayyarpitamanobuddhiryo madbhaktaha sa me priyaha || 14 ||*

santushtaha : contented
satatam : always
yogee : yogi
yataatmaa : self controlled
dridhanishchayaha : firm conviction
mayi : to me
arpita : dedicated
manobuddhihi : mind and intellect
yaha : he who
madbhaktaha : my devotee
saha : he
me : me
priyaha : dear

The yogi who is always contented, self controlled, with firm conviction, who has dedicated his mind and intellect to me, he who is such a devotee of mine is dear to me.

Most of us derive contentment from people, objects and situations in the world, most notably after consuming a delicious meal. Contentment is a state where the mind does not want anything else from the world. But, this state is temporary because the contentment has been triggered by something that is temporary and finite, like food for example. Shri Krishna says that the yogi, the perfected devotee, derives contentment from Ishvara within himself, therefore he does not need to become a bhogi, one who runs after material objects for contentment. He is "satatam santushta", even contented.

Another quality of a perfected devotee is a firm conviction that only Ishvara exists, and that the world does not exist independently of Ishvara. Most of us assume that the world has an independent existence. We attach all sorts of values to it, causing our intellect to generate innumerable goals and convictions around those values. The perfected devotee sees only Ishvara everywhere, and therefore is ever steadfast in his conviction that only Ishvara exists.

This "dridha nishchaya" or firm conviction is demonstrated by the devotee's submission of mind and intellect in Ishvara, and also, the control of the mind, body and senses. When the intellect is convinced that only Ishvara exists, and when the mind thinks only of Ishvara, the devotee does not need any other special yogic technique to control the organs of action and the sense organs. Selfish desires are the cause of the mind, body and senses deviating from prescribed actions. When there is only the desire for Ishvara, they can never deviate. Shri Krishna says that the perfected devotee is a "satatam yataatmaa", one who has complete self control at all times.

Here Shri Krishna concludes the line of thought that he began in the previous shloka by asserting that the devotee who has inculcated these traits is very dear to Ishvara. These eight shlokas starting from the thirteenth shloka are one of the most famous and beloved shlokas in the

Gita.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 12

*yasmaannodvijate loka lokaannodvijate cha yaha |
harshaamarshabhayodvegairmukto yaha sa cha me priyaha || 15 ||*

By whom no one is agitated, and who is not agitated by anyone, who is free from excitement, irritation, fear and agitation, he is dear to me.

Wikipedia defines a "roast" as follows: A roast is an event, almost exclusively in the United States, in which an individual is subjected to a public presentation of comedic insults, praise, outlandish true and untrue stories, and heartwarming tributes, the implication being that the roastee is able to take the jokes in good humor and not as serious criticism or insult, and therefore, show their good nature. It is seen by some as a great honour to be roasted, as the individual is surrounded by friends, fans, and well-wishers, who can receive some of the same treatment as well during the course of the evening. The party and presentation itself are both referred to as a roast.

In our life, when we are dealing with other people, it is inevitable that we will experience a whole host of emotional reactions to what those people say to us. Four common reactions are excitement on hearing something pleasant, irritation on hearing something unpleasant, fear on hearing something worrisome, and agitation when meeting someone that has the upper hand in the conversation. But in a "roast", the individual happily accepts all sorts of abuses and insults, because he knows that they are coming from his friends and well-wishers, people that he knows as his own, not separate from him. At the end of the roast, the individual in turn insults and abuses the people that insulted him earlier, and no one feels any ill-will towards him for the same reasons.

Similarly, the devotee who considers everyone and everything as the play of Ishvara, including himself, has no reason to take anything personally. His sense of self is not the small ego that most of us consider as our "I". He has identified with Ishvara who runs multitudes of universes. Any sort of insult, agitation or fear dissipates instantly because he views the insult, the insulter and the recipient of the insult as Ishvara. He thinks of it as a play where his friends are the actors and directors. Shri Krishna says that such a person who is free from agitations, and who does not agitate any one else, is dear to him.

yasmaat : by whom
na : not
udvijate : agitated
lokaha : any one
lokaat : by any one
na : not
udvijate : agitated
cha : and
yaha : who
muktaha : free from
yaha : who
saha : he
cha : and
me : to me
priyaha : dear

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 12

*anapekshaha shuchirdaksha udaaseeno gatavyathaha |
sarvaarambhaparityaagee yo madbhaktaha sa me priyaha || 16 ||*

One who is without expectation, pure, dextrous, unconcerned, fearless, renouncing all new initiatives, he who is such a devotee of mine, he is dear to me.

anapekshaha : without expectation
shuchihi : pure
dakshaha : dextrous
udaaseenaha : unconcerned
gatavyathaha : fearless
sarvaarambhaparityaagee : renouncing
all new initiatives
yaha : he who
madbhaktaha : my devotee
saha : he
me : to me
priyaha : dear

In the previous shloka, Shri Krishna explained the attitude of the perfected devotee when dealing with other people. Now, he explains the perfected devotee's attitude towards action. It is not a surprise to us that the perfected devotee is also a perfected karma yogi. He has understood the art of performing any action, big or small, in line with Shri Krishna's teaching on karma yoga, thereby achieving perfection in action.

To begin with, the perfected karma yogi is shuchihi or pure. His mind has been purged of selfish desires, leaving room only for actions pertaining to his duties or svadharma. If the action is not part of his svadharma, he doesn't undertake new initiatives unnecessarily. Also, he dedicates the results of his actions to Ishvara. This enables him to give up apekshaa or expectations about the result, as well as concern about what happened in the past. He is udaaseenaha, unconcerned and unattached, not because he does not care about the action, but because he doesn't get attached to the result of the action.

With no mental agitations caused by future expectations or past anxiety, the karma yogi performs actions with great dexterity and fearlessness. "Yogaha karmasu kaushalam" - dexterity in action is karma yoga as we saw in the second chapter. The karma yogi devotes all his attention and brings great focus to the task at hand, keeping all distractions aside. He also performs the work as an emissary of Ishvara, which removes any notion of fear, hesitation or doubt from his mind. Shri Krishna says that this type of devotee, the perfected karma yogi, is very dear to him.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 12

*yo na hrishyati na dveshti na shochati na kaanshati |
shubhaashubhaparityaagee bhaktimaanhyaha sa me priyaha || 17 ||*

He who neither rejoices nor hates, neither rejoices nor grieves, he who has given up good and bad, he who is (such a) devoted person, he is dear to me.

In the previous shloka, Shri Krishna described the attitude of a perfected devotee towards the performance of actions. He now elaborates upon the attitude of a perfected devotee towards situations, objects, thoughts and emotions that he encounters. These may come to him either as a result of his actions or as a matter of course in his daily life.

When we usually encounter a situation or obtain an object, we are either attracted to it, repulsed by it or are indifferent to it. Attraction generates desires that are stored in our mind, and repulsion generates negative desires, a list of things we would like to stay away from. If we eventually get the favourable object, or hold on to the favourable situation long enough, we become "harshita", we rejoice. But if we lose that object or situation, which is bound to happen sometime, we become "shochita", we grieve. Attraction, revulsion, desire, hatred, joy, grief - this is how most of us usually operate.

The perfected devotee, however, has tackled this problem at its root. He has stopped labelling any object, person, situation or thought as either good or bad, because it is exactly this labelling that starts the chain reaction of attraction, desire, joy and sorrow. He is like the model student who does not label his teacher's feedback as good or bad, whether it be praise or criticism, because he has the utmost faith in his teacher. The perfected devotee accepts all objects and situations as Ishvara's blessings, does what he has to do, and moves on. Shri Krishna says that one who accepts whatever comes with way due to his faith and devotion to Ishvara, is dear to him.

yaha : he who
na : not
hrishyati : rejoices
na : not
dveshti : hates
na : not
shochati : grieves
na : not
kaanshati : desires
shubhaashubhaparityaagee : given up
good and bad
bhaktimaan : devoted person
yaha : he who
saha : he
me : me
priyaha : dear

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 12

*samaha shatrau cha mitre cha tathaa maanaapamaanayoho |
sheetoshnasukhaduhkheshu samaha sangavarjitaha || 18 ||*

samaha : alike
shatrau : foe
cha : and
mitre : friend
cha : and
tathaa : also
maanaapamaanayoho : in honour and dishonour
sheetoshnasukhaduhkheshu : in cold and heat as well as joy and sorrow
samaha : alike
sangavarjitaha : without attachment

He who is alike to friend and foe, in honour and dishonour, and also alike in cold and heat, in joy and sorrow, without attachment...

In this shloka and the next, Shri Krishna begins to summarize the signs of a perfected devotee. By using the word "samaha" twice, he emphasizes equanimity and stability of the devotee's antahakarana or inner instrument that is made possible through intense devotion to Ishvara. Right from the second chapter, we have repeatedly heard about the importance of bringing equanimity to the inner instrument, which is made up of our intellect, our mind and senses, our ego and our memory. Just like an astronomer can see extremely faint light from stars that are millions of miles away using his telescope, we can experience the eternal essence only if our inner instrument is free of desires and agitations caused by the reactions mentioned in this and the next shloka.

Our inner equipment contacts the world through the sense organs. The skin, for example, experiences heat and cold. This reporting of hotness or coolness is akin to a thermometer in that it is extremely objective and factual. When this sensation travels to the mind, however, it can be interpreted either as joy or sorrow based on inputs from other sense organs and from the memory. If the skin sends a message of hotness, the mind feels joy in winter and sorrow in summer. Similarly, sounds are picked up by the ear, sent to the mind which compares them against its memory to generate words. If the words enhance the ego, the "doer" notion in the intellect, registers a sense of honour. If the words bring down the ego, the intellect registers dishonour.

What causes the intellect and the mind to attach all these positive and negative reactions to simple messages that come from the skin and the ears and so on? It is the degree of attachment or identification of the ego. If the ego is heavily attached to the body, for example, then any comment about the body will generate a strong positive or negative reaction in the mind, disturbing its sense of equanimity in the process.

But one who has removed his attachment from the body/mind/intellect and attached himself to the service of Ishvara does not generate strong

positive or negative reactions. He considers his body as a part of Ishvara's creation, therefore there is very little sense of egoism when it comes to the body, mind or intellect. When someone criticizes a devotee's body, it is like someone is criticizing a random object that the devotee has no connection with, and hence, no strong positive or negative reaction is generated.

The message of this shloka concludes in the following shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 12

*tulyanindaastutirmauni santushto yena kenachita |
aniketaha sthiramatirbhaktimaanme priyo naraha || 19 ||*

To whom praise and insult are same, who is silent, content with anything, who is without a home, with unwavering mind, a person who is such a devotee is dear to me.

tulyanindaastutihi : praise and insult
are same
mauni : one who is silent
santushtaha : content
yena kenachita : with anything
aniketaha : without a home
sthiramatih : unwavering mind
bhaktimaan : devotee
me : me
priyaha : dear
naraha : person

Shri Krishna continues summarizing the twelfth chapter in this shloka by listing further attributes of the perfected devotee. He first says that both praise and insult have no effect on the devotee. Praise and insult are usually targeted towards a person's name. But the devotee, having given up all identification with his name, does not care whether he is praised or insulted, just like the sky does not get affected whether someone throws roses at it or dirt. The devotee is also a mauni, one who remains silent. Here, the silence does not refer to verbal silence but to silence of desires and thoughts that are devoid of Ishvara as their basis.

The ocean is not affected whether it gets a torrential downpour or no rain at all. It happily accepts whatever comes its way because it is content with itself. Similarly, the devotee is content in his constant devotion to Ishvara, and therefore accepts whatever comes his way without any complaint. The devotee also does not have an attitude of possession towards anything, including his home. Like the wind that comes and goes anywhere as it pleases, the devotee considers the entire world his home and is attached his house, his physical body, his mind, his intellect or his desires.

As we proceed along the path of devotion, we will notice that our mind shifts between giving reality to the world as part of Ishvara, and giving reality to the world as separate from Ishvara. As long as we give reality to the world as an independent entity, we can never get rid of our unfulfilled desires, and the attachment to the world that results from those desires. A perfected devotee is one whose mind is fixed on giving reality to the world as a part of Ishvara, giving up all selfish desires in the process. Shri Krishna says that a person who harbours all these attributes is fit to be called a naraha, a human being, in the true sense of the world. Such a devoted person is very dear to him.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 12

*ye tu dharmyaamritamidam yathoktam paryupaasate |
shradyadhaanaa matparamaa bhaktosteteeva me priyaha || 20 ||*

Therefore, those who partake of this nectar of law described here, endowed with faith, keeping me as the goal, those devotees are extremely dear to me.

Shri Krishna began listing the attributes of perfected devotees starting from the thirteenth chapter. In this shloka, he concludes this topic by highlighting two key attributes of such devotees: shraddha or faith, and making Ishvara as their ultimate goal, "matparamaahaa". He terms the teaching of this chapter as the nectar of dharma. We can interpret the word dharma to mean the universal law of nature from the ninth chapter, or also as the nine fold bhaagvat dharma of Prahlada that was explained earlier in this chapter.

Why are faith and goal-setting given such importance in bhakti or the path of devotion? Consider a child who eventually wants to study at one of the top universities in the world. Until he reaches a stage where he can qualify to attend that university, get selected for admission and begin his coursework, he needs to have faith in the notion that graduating from that university will significantly improve his life. That faith will propel him to set the single-pointed goal of academic success, work hard, to keep aside all distractions and to not give up. Only when he actually graduates will he not need faith anymore, because he has achieved what he set out to achieve. But until then, it is only faith in the goal that keeps him going.

Therefore, Shri Krishna says that those devotees who have fixed Ishvara as the goal, and that who have unwavering faith in that goal, are extremely dear to him. Devotees who love Ishvara without having known him first are devotees of the highest caliber, since it is more difficult to love something without having first known it. Such devotees, who do not need to become monks but just diligently worship Ishvara with form, are assured of liberation by Ishvara himself. This is the concluding message of the twelfth chapter.

*om tatsatiti shreematbhagavatgitasupanishadsu brahmavidyaayaam
yogashaastre shreekrishnaarjunsamvade bhaktiyogo naama dvaadashodhyaayaha
|| 12 ||*

ye : those who
tu : therefore
dharmyaamritam : nectar of law
idam : this
yatha : here
uktam : described
paryupaasate : partake
shradyadhaanaa : endowed with faith
mat : me
paramaahaa : goal
bhaktaaha : devotees
te : those
ateeva : extremely
me : me
priyaha : dear

Summary of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 12

Shri Krishna ended the previous chapter with the message that Ishvara is in everything, and everything is in Ishvara. But since our senses see the world and not Ishvara, we need a way to constantly be aware of Ishvara's presence. Till we get to a state where this happens effortlessly, Shri Krishna asks us to take up the path of bhakti or devotion, where we constantly abide in the faith that Ishvara is in everything, and everything is in Ishvara. The seed of bhakti yoga was planted at the end of the previous chapter and is expounded in this chapter.

Arjuna began this chapter by asking the question: of the devotees who worship Ishvara with form, and of those who worship him without form, who is superior? Shri Krishna replied that the worshipper of Ishvara without form sees no difference between him and Ishvara. But for most of us who still have a little saatvik ahamkaara, which is the sense of distance or separation between us and Ishvara, worship of the formless Ishvara is quite difficult. Therefore, he recommends worship of Ishvara with form for the majority of devotees. The key qualification, however, is that of single pointed devotion.

Next, Shri Krishna gives us a sequence of steps to get to Ishvara, but takes into account where we are as ordinary devotees. We are instructed to begin with karma yoga where we renounce the fruits of action by submitting them to Ishvara. We then begin performing every action for the sake of Ishvara, which is bhakti yoga, the yoga of devotion. Once we have diminished our selfish desires and our ego to a large extent, we are urged to take up raaja yoga where we repeatedly meditate upon Ishvara with form. Finally, we reach a stage where we remain in constant awareness and knowledge of our oneness with Ishvara, which is jnyaana yoga, the yoga of knowledge.

The chapter ends with a list of thirty nine qualities of a perfected devotee. They are meant to inspire us. Even if we cannot gain all these qualities, we should aim for acquiring at least one, because gaining even one quality opens the door to the acquiring the rest. In all of these qualities, equanimity, unselfishness, lack of attachment and unwavering faith towards Ishvara are repeatedly emphasized.



Kshetra Kshetrajnya Vibhaaga Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 13**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**idam shareeram kaunteya kshetramityaabhidheeyate |
etadyo vetti tam prahuhu kshetrajnya iti tadvidaha || 1 ||*

idam : this
 shareeram : body
 kaunteya : O Kaunteya
 kshetram : field
 iti : in this manner
 abhidheeyate : defined as
 etat : it
 yaha : which
 vetti : knows
 tam : he who
 prahuhu : call
 kshetrajnya : knower of the field
 iti : in this manner
 tadvidaha : knowers of both

Shree Bhagavaan said: This body is defined as the "field", O Kaunteya, and he who knows it is called the "knower of the field", in this manner, by the knowers of both.

As we commence the thirteenth chapter, let us take stock of where we have come so far in the Gita. In the first six chapters, Shri Krishna focused on revealing the true nature of the individual self, what we refer to as "I". In the first chapter, Arjuna was caught in a web of grief and delusion because he considered himself as a body that is attached to its friends and family. Shri Krishna revealed to Arjuna that his nature was the infinite eternal essence and not the body. He then guided Arjuna step by step through the means of arriving at this understanding starting with karma yoga, then karma sanyaasa yoga, and finally dhyana yoga. Only in meditation can we experience the true nature of our "I" as the "saakshi" or witness of our body, mind and intellect.

In the next set of six chapters, Shri Krishna focused on revealing the true nature of the world we live in. We usually think of the world as comprised of matter in various forms. Shri Krishna revealed to Arjuna that this world is comprised not only of matter, but also of spirit or life-giving consciousness. These are also known as the lower and higher aspects of Prakriti or nature, respectively. He then revealed that Prakriti is nothing but a shakti or power of Ishvara himself, and therefore Ishvara is in all, and all is in Ishvara. He is the material cause or the raw matter, as well as the efficient cause or the intelligence that has created the universe. The true nature of the world is Ishvara who is the "adhishtaana", the foundation or the substratum of the world.

Having revealed all of this, why do we need six more chapters? Let us proceed step by step, since we will be delving into new waters. Our antahakarana or inner instrument comprising the mind, intellect, ego and memory comes with three inbuilt defects. "Mala" or dirt comprises our stock of unfulfilled desires. "Vikshepa" is the tendency of the mind to jump from one thought to another. "Aavarana" is the veiling or covering that hides the understanding of the true nature of the self, of who we are in essence. Karma yoga helps remove the defect

of mala by extinguishing selfish desires to a great extent. Bhakti yoga helps remove the defect of vikshepa through single-pointed devotion of Ishvara. However, we will never achieve complete self realization unless we tackle the third defect of Aavarana. That is the purpose of the last six chapters of the Gita.

How do the last six chapters remove this defect of aavarana or veiling? This can happen only when we intuitively understand the true meaning of the "mahaa vaakyas" or great statements that have been revealed in the Vedas. The Gita reveals the mahaa vaakya "Tat Tvam Asi" which means "You Are That". The first six chapters of the Gita revealed the nature of "Tvam" which means "You" as the saakshi or witness, and the next six chapters revealed the true nature of "Tat" which means "That" as Ishvara, the adhishtana or foundation. The last six chapters reveal "Asi", the identity or the equality between the real nature of "You" and "That". Shri Krishna knows that this topic may be somewhat tough to understand, so he addresses Arjuna as "Kaunteya", one whose intellect is as sharp as a knife or "kunta", so that he remains sharp and alert throughout this chapter.

Now, let us look at the first shloka. The term "shareera" or body is used in a general sense to refer to the three bodies that we are made up of: the physical body, the subtle body (the mind, intellect, ego, memory and the physiological functions) and the causal body (our vaasanaas or unfulfilled desires). In other words, anything that is temporary, changing and perishable is referred to as "this body". Shri Krishna says that anything that we term as "this body" is defined as the "kshetra", the field. But there is something in us which is changeless and knows that it is different from the ever-changing field. This intelligence principle in us, this consciousness is termed as the "kshetragna", the knower of the field. Both these terms are defined by the knowers of both the field and its knower, in other words, great seers and sages.

Why do we need to know such esoteric terms? Shri Krishna uses these terms to lay the groundwork for the next shloka, which is one of the most important shlokas in the Gita. He wants to give a foundation that we can use a spring board to leap into the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 13

*kshetragnya chaapi maam viddhi sarvakshetreshu bhaarata |
kshetrakshetragnayorjnyaanam yattajnyaanam matam mama || 2 ||*

And also, understand that I am the knower of all fields, O Bhaarata. That knowledge which pertains to the field and its knower, in my opinion, that is (real) knowledge.

Shri Krishna began the previous chapter by defining two terms: kshetra which means field, and kshetragnya which means the knower of the field, one who knows himself as distinct from the field. In this shloka, Shri Krishna uses these terms to indicate the identity or oneness of the kshetragnya in all kshetras. Let us try to understand this very important point. Like Arjuna did in the first chapter, most of us consider our self, our "I", as this body, and therefore get stuck in the sorrows of this world. As we understand the message of the first six chapters, we understand that we are the eternal essence which is different than our body. We then understand from the next six chapters that Ishvara is the foundation of this world as the lower Prakriti or matter, and higher Prakriti or consciousness. Now, in this shloka, Shri Krishna says that there is no such distinction between the individual eternal essence and the foundation of this world. There is only one kshetragnya, and any notion of separation is illusory, caused by avidyaa or ignorance. This is the great statement, the mahaa vaakya "Tat Tvam Asi" of the Vedas. You and Ishvara are the same in essence, there is no difference.

When we first hear someone say that we are the same as Ishvara, we don't find it quite logical. We say, how can a body that is five feet eight inches tall be the same as Ishvara who is large enough to contain all the planets and stars of the universe within him? To answer this, we have to first remember that "Tat Tvam Asi" is not meant to be taken literally. Again, let us proceed step by step. First, let us understand the term "upaadhi". It means something that limits or conditions a more general thing. A wave is an upaadhi of water. A light bulb is an upaadhi of electricity. An ornament is an upaadhi of gold. We can obtain the general thing that the upaadhi limits or hides by a process of mental removal. Mentally remove the wave, and you get water. Mentally remove the bulb, you get electricity. Mentally remove the ornament, you get gold. We can take this even further. Mentally remove the labels Mercedes Benz and Maruti 800 from the word car, and you get metal, rubber, petrol and plastic. Mentally remove the labels Indian

kshetragnya : knower of the field
cha : and
api : also
maam : I
viddhi : understand
sarakshetreshu : all fields
bhaarata : O Bhaarata
kshetrakshetragnayoho : field and its
knower
jnyaanam : knowledge
yat : that which
tat : that
jnyaanam : knowledge
matam : opinion
mama : my

and American from the word person, and you get flesh, bones and blood.

Now, having understood what an upaadhi is, and how it can be mentally removed, let us proceed to understand what the word "Asi" in "Tat Tvam Asi" indicates. It is not to be literally interpreted as Tvam (You) Asi (are equal to) Tat (Ishvara). Asi means "are equal to, when you remove the upaadhi". If we apply this meaning, the mahaa vaakya reads : Tvam (You) Asi (are equal to) Tat (Ishvara) when you remove both the upaadhis of You and Ishvara. I as a human have the upaadhi of the physical body and everything it contains. Ishvara has the upaadhi of the entire universe in its visible form including all the trees, plants, animals, people, stars, planets etc that we see with our senses. If we mentally remove our body as an upaadhi, and we also mentally remove the visible universe as an upaadhi, we are left with the same eternal essence in both cases. That same eternal essence, that same kshetragnya, is present in all kshetras, which are the same as upaadhis.

Another meaning of the word "upaadhi" is title or qualification, which can help us understand this shloka in a different way. Let's say there are two brothers in a house. One of them has a PhD in physics, and the other is a manager in a multinational. When each of them is in their respective offices, they use their titles as part of their job responsibilities. But when they perform a pooja or a holy ritual, let's say, they mentally remove their upaadhis or titles. If they did not remove their titles, their conversation would go like this: "Hey PhD in physics, do this. Hey manager, pour the clarified butter". They would never see that they are really the same family under the titles that seemingly create differences. This means that removing upaadhis to realize our oneness with Ishvara can be difficult, but it is not impossible. We know how to remove small upaadhis. Shri Krishna will teach us how to remove the biggest upaadhis in this chapter through practical techniques. He says that ultimately, knowledge of the kshetragnya, the kshetras or upaadhis, and how to realize oneness under the kshetras, is the ultimate knowledge that one has to learn, and not any other type of knowledge.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 13

*tatkshetram yachcha yaadrika cha yadvikaari yatashcha yata |
sa cha yo yatprabhaavashcha tatsamaasena me shrunu || 3 ||*

And what is that field, and of what is its nature, and what are its modifications, and from where it was born; and who is he and what are his powers, listen from me in brief.

Since we covered a lot of ground in the prior two shlokas, let us do a quick recap. Shri Krishna said that there is only one kind of knowledge that has to be known by a seeker: that there are several bodies or conditionings called fields, and there is just one knower of the field that is as though limited by these bodies due to ignorance or avidyaa. Since there is a lot more to be said about this subject, Shri Krishna lists all the relevant topics that he has to cover.

With regards to the kshetra, the field, we have to learn about what it is, what are its characteristics, how does it undergo modifications and what is its source. With regards to the knower of the field, the kshetragnya, we have to also learn what it is, what are its powers and what are its effects. This is the theoretical aspect of this chapter. All this will be covered in just a few shlokas, or "in brief" from Shri Krishna's standpoint, but we will study it elaborately.

Another topic that will be covered in this chapter is the comparison between the individual and the world, how does the individual come in contact with the world, how does he transact with the world, and what are the means of knowledge he can use to maintain the awareness of the field and its knower throughout his life. This is an extremely practical and useful aspect of this chapter.

tat : that
kshetram : field
yat : which
cha : and
yaadrika : what is its nature
cha : and
yadvikaari : what are its modifications
yataha : from where it was born
cha : and
yat : who is
saha : he
cha : and
yaha : what
yatprabhaavaha : his powers
cha : and
tat : that
samaasena : in brief
me : from me
shrunu : listen

Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 13

*rishibhirbahudhaa geetam chandobhivividhaihi prithak |
brahmasootrapadaishchaiva hetumadbhivinishchitaihi || 4 ||*

rishibhihi : by sages
bahudhaa : many ways
geetam : sung
chandobhihi : Vedic chants
vividhaihi : various
prithak : distinctly
brahmasootrapadaihi : Brahma Sootra texts
cha : and
eva : also
hetumadbhihi : logical
vinishchitaihi : conclusive

Sages have sung (about the field and its knower) in many ways, it has been stated in various Vedic chants and also in the logical and conclusive texts of the Brahma Sootras.

Shri Krishna glorifies the knowledge of the field and its knower in this shloka. He affirms that this very same knowledge was first revealed to the rishis or sages, and is not something that has been invented in the Gita. It was then documented in the four Vedas: the Rik, Saama, Yajur and Atharva. It is to be found in all three sections of each of these Vedas: the Samhitaa (hymns), Braahmanaa (theology) and Upanishads (discourses on divine knowledge). It is important to note that this knowledge was revealed to the sages in their meditations, and not authored as an original composition by anybody. Since this knowledge is beyond the realm of the senses and the mind, it could not have come from any one person's mind. It had to come from direct experience arrived at through meditation.

Now, even if we are able to access this divine knowledge by studying the Vedas, we cannot assimilate this knowledge without the help of logic. We need something that can explain, step-by-step, what is revealed in the four Vedas. We also need logic to reconcile apparent contradictions that we as students come across while studying the Vedas. The Brahma Sootras, authored by Vyaasa, use logic and reason to present the knowledge of the Vedas in a precise, formula-like method. Each sootra in that text is hardly two or three words long, but is packed with so much information that commentators like Shankaraachaarya write pages and pages to explain just one sootra.

The Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads and the Brahma Sootras are known as the "Prasthaana Traya", and together provide a comprehensive compendium of knowledge about the field and its knower, as well as practical training on how to go about it. Of the three, the Bhagavad Gita is closest to the understanding of a common man. Shri Krishna instructs us to learn about the field and the knower in brief such that we can progress in our spiritual journey. But if we want to delve deeper into the details for academic reasons, we are more than welcome to read the Vedas and the Brahma Sootras. He now proceeds to talk about the

field, the kshetra, in detail.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 13

*mahaabhootaanyahankaaro buddhiravyaktameva cha |
indriyaani dashaikam cha pancha chendriyagocharaahaa || 5 ||*

mahaabhootaani : great elements
ahankaaraha : ego
buddhihi : intellect
avyaktam : unmanifest
eva : also
cha : and
indriyaani : senses
dasha : ten
ekam : one
cha : and
pancha : five
cha : and
indriyagocharaahaa : objects of senses

The great elements, the ego, the intellect, the unmanifest, and also the ten senses, and the one, and five objects of senses.

Nowadays, most computers have the ability to go into sleep mode, where all the running programs are saved in a file on the disk in such a way that they are brought back to life as soon as the computer is switched on again. Similarly, when the universe comes into existence, its entire state is restored from avyaktam, the unmanifest "file" containing the sum total of every unfulfilled desire. We then begin to see faint outlines of the universe, just like the computer first draws the outlines of the windows on the screen. This state is known as buddhi. We finally see the universe in full colour, in all its glory, just like we see a fully painted screen on our computer. This state is known as ahankara. This fully painted screen is created by combining three colours - red, blue and green - in various ways.

Similarly, the entire universe is created by combining the five great elements - space, air, fire, water and earth - in various ways. As humans, we are also comprised of those same five great elements. But, each of us looks and behaves differently than the other due to the difference in our "programming" - the avyakta, also known as vaasanaas or unfulfilled desires. Also, there is something within us that give us the ability to think, feel and act, which we do not see in inert objects. This is the inner instrument or the antahakarana. It is comprised of the buddhi or intellect which plans and decides, the ahankaara or ego which creates a sense of agency or I-ness and the mind which thinks and feels, referred in the shloka as "ekam" or the one.

The mind receives stimuli from five sense organs - ears, skin, eyes, tongue and nose which run after their objects - sound, touch, form, taste and smell, respectively. The mind also controls five organs of action - mouth, hands, legs, genitals and bowels. The five elements, the five sense organs, their five corresponding sense objects, the five organs of actions, the mind, the intellect, the ego and the unmanifest - these make up the twenty four categories of the universe mentioned in the Saamkhya school of philosophy.

In just one shloka, Shri Krishna has explained the entire process of cosmic creation and its building blocks, as well as the specific factors that enable humans to think, feel and act. Plants and animals are also made up of similar building blocks, although not as fully expressed as in humans. Whenever we develop anxiety or frustration that this world is becoming too complex to understand, we can refer to this shloka and understand that at its core, the world is quite simple. Also, whenever we develop the mistaken notion that we are independent and do not need anything from this world, this shloka shows us our oneness with the world. Now this shloka only provides a static view of the world. How do we account for all the dynamism, the movement, the give and take between one human being and the rest of the world? This is explained in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 6, Chapter 13

*ichchaa dveshaha sukham duhkham sanghaataschetanaa dhritihi |
etat kshetram samaasena savikaram udaahritam || 6 ||*

ichchaa : desire
dveshaha : hatred
sukham : joy
duhkham : sorrow
sanghaataha : assembly
chetanaa : awareness
dhritihi : fortitude
etat : this
kshetram : field
samaasena : in brief
savikaram : with modifications
udaahritam : has been illustrated

Desire, hatred, joy, sorrow, assembly, awareness, fortitude. This field with its modifications has been illustrated in brief.

Previously, Shri Krishna explained the creation and make-up of the world and the individual as comprised of 24 constituents. Now he explains how the individual comes into contact with the world. We saw in the last shloka that all of us come with a stock of unfulfilled desires or vaasanas that causes the individual to be born in this world. Shri Krishna says that the sprouting of desires or "ichchaa" causes us to approach the world for fulfillment of those desires. If we obtain what we desire, we experience joy, and if we don't obtain it, we experience sorrow. If something repeatedly gives us sorrow, we develop a sense of hatred or "dvesha" towards it.

Desire, hatred, joy and sorrow are modifications or changes in the inner instrument, the antahakarana. The antahakarana always wants to create a sense of wholeness or completeness out of the diversity of limbs, hair, nerves, nails etc that make up one body. But it also wants to keep this collection of what it calls the body distinct from everything else in the world. This notion of completeness is called "sanghaata" meaning assembly, and the will to preserve the assembly and keep it distinct from the world is called "dhriti" or fortitude. All biological desires arise from this desire to maintain the body as a distinct single entity.

Now we come to the modification of the antahakarana that gives it the quality of awareness and sentiency, known as "chetanaa" or awareness. Though we may be tempted to think that this sentiency in the antahakarana is the soul, the atma, the eternal essence, it is not. It is a borrowed kind of awareness caused by a reflection of the eternal essence in the antahakarana, just like a pot filled with water reflects the sun in it. In fact, chetanaa and the six other modifications mentioned in this shloka are variously assumed to be the eternal essence by various schools of philosophy. Shri Krishna asserts that everything mentioned in this shloka and the prior shloka is not the eternal essence. It is kshetra, the field.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 13

*amaanitvamadamhritvamahimsaa kshaantiraarjavam |
aachaaryopaasanam shaucham sthairyamaatmavinigrahaha || 7 ||*

Humility, unpretentiousness, non-injury, forgiveness, straightforwardness, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self control.

amaanitvam : humility
adamhritvam : unpretentiousness
ahimsaa : non-injury
kshaantihi : forgiveness
aarjavam : straightforwardness
aachaaryopaasanam : service of the teacher
shaucham : purity
sthairyam : steadfastness
aatmavinigrahaha : self control

Let us do a quick recap. Shri Krishna began this chapter with a brief explanation of what is the field or kshetra, and who is its knower or kshetragnya. He then asserted that there is only one knower of all the fields in the universe. After that, he categorized twenty four items that can be each considered as a field. From this shloka, Shri Krishna changes the topic from theoretical description to extremely practical techniques that help us bring this teaching into our daily lives. These techniques train us to spot the field or upaadhi that we are giving importance and subsequently reduce the level of importance we give to it. The less importance we give to any of these twenty four upaadhis, the closer we are to realizing our oneness with the eternal essence that is beyond any field or upaadhi.

"Maana" means overestimation of one's own self-worth. This self-worth can be derived from health, wealth, power, beauty, control, position, any of these characteristics. Acknowledgement that we have one or more of these characteristics, a correct assessment of these characteristics is fine, but when pride or "abhimaan" derived from these characteristics makes us crave extra attention or put down someone else, it is to be avoided. "Amaanitam" is an absence of pride about any of the above-mentioned characteristics. "Dambha" means pretentiousness or falsehood. In the case of abhimaan, we had some characteristic in us that made us puff up with pride. In dambha, we derive a false sense of pride where there is no positive trait to speak of whatsoever. It is completely hollow pride. We see examples in bollywood movies where the boy will rent or steal a fancy car in order to impress his girlfriend. If we have this trait in us, very few people will trust us to do any task well. It is easy to see through people who have dambha. So then, "adamhritvam" is utter absence of pretentiousness.

"Himsaa" means injury in a very broad sense of the word. There are five afflictions that are mentioned in the Yoga school of philosophy: ignorance, arrogance, desire, hatred and fear of death. Whenever we cause any of these afflictions or kleshas in any other person, we are in-

juring that person. When we do not cause any of these afflictions, we demonstrate ahimsaa or non-injury. "Kshaantihi" is an attitude of forgiveness that comes out of extreme titkshaa which is forbearance and tolerance. If we do not have this quality, we will get angry, flare up and lose our equanimity at every little jab or insult that anyone throws at us. In the second chapter Shri Krishna had emphasized the quality of forbearance as a means to achieve equanimity as well. The attitude of forgiveness developed through forbearance is similar to that of a mother who forgives any mistake committed by her child.

"Aarjavam" refers to straightforwardness, an absence of crookedness in dealing with the world. It is derived from the root "riju" which is the root of the word "Arjuna" as well. This quality is reflected in us when our thoughts are aligned with our actions. Even children can see through someone who says one thing and does something else. "Aacharya" refers to someone who collects the essence of the scriptures, like a honeybee collects nectar from flowers. Giving respect to such a learned master is called "aacharya upaasanam". By doing so, we acknowledge that we do not know everything, and that we are ready to follow the path laid out by the teacher, no matter how much it hurts our ego.

"Shaucham" is purity of the body and the mind. The ritual of pooja is emphasized in Indian children because in that short period of time, we learn to maintain a high degree of external purity. If we reflect on this as we get older, that notion of external purity slowly seeps into our mind, and encourages us to develop purity in thought as well. "Sthairyam" is the strength to remain firm in one's convictions, to remain steadfast in what we do. If we decide to meditate for ten minutes daily but cannot even do so for a couple of days, we will not be able to tackle much more challenging aspects of our material and spiritual journeys. "Aatmaa vinigraha" is our ability to control our mind from its natural tendency to run after sense objects. The sense organs, which are under the control of the mind, have a natural tendency to go outwards. Through self control, we learn to turn them inward.

Shri Krishna covered nine qualities in this shloka. There are eleven more that are covered in the next few shlokas.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 13

*indriyaartheshu vairaagyamanahankaara eva cha |
janmamrityujaraavyaadhiduhkhadoshaanudarshanam || 8 ||*

indriyaartheshu : sense objects
vairaagyam : dispassion
anahankaara : absence of ego
eva : also
cha : and
duhkhadoshaanudarshanam : constant
perception of sorrow

Dispassion towards sense objects, absence of ego, as well as constant perception of sorrow towards birth, death, old age and disease.

Shri Krishna continues listing the attributes that help us reduce the importance of the kshetra or the field. Here he lists dispassion of sense objects, absence of ego and investigation into the modifications of the human body as three further attributes in addition to the nine mentioned in the previous shloka.

We have five sense organs that can contact the world and perceive objects. They have raaga (attraction), dvesha (hatred) or viraaga (indifference) towards objects. If we see a lump of clay, for example, we have neither attraction or hatred towards it. The mind is not disturbed when the senses remain free of the labelling of raaga or dvesha. When our senses develop indifference towards every object that they perceive, it is the state of vairagyam or dispassion towards sense objects. So, regardless of whether the object in question is in front of us or someone reminds us of that object, our mind remains unaffected by its presence.

Previously, we came across the term "abhimaaan" which meant a sense of mine-ness towards external attributes such as wealth, power, position and so on. "Ahankaara" in this context is a stronger form of abhimaaan where we develop a sense of mine-ness towards our own body, mind and intellect. If one has pride about a gold medal in mathematics, that is abhimaaan. But if one is proud about one's intelligence, that is ahankaara. Anahankaara is the absence of such pride, and it is born out of constant dispassion or vairagya towards the body and its temporary nature. Moreover, even a simple bit of contemplation will reveal that for the majority of the population, there is always someone who will eventually overtake us with a better body, mind and intellect.

So far we came across pleasure derived out of sense objects, as well as pride in the functioning of the body, mind and intellect. Both these notions stem from the assumption that our body will remain healthy and fit eternally. But, even if we walk the corridor of any hospital for five minutes, we see the silliness in holding on to that assumption.

"Dosha-anudarshanam" is the constant, repeated perception of sorrow in all of these states of the body, not just when we visit the hospital. Now, although we consider disease, old age and death as sorrowful, Shri Krishna adds birth to this list as well. It is full of suffering for both the child and the mother. In the Dasbodh of Swami Ramdas, as well as the Shiva Apraadha Stotram of Shankaraachaarya, there is an elaborate description of the painful process of birth.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 9, Chapter 13

asaktiranabhishvangaha putradaaragrihaadishu |
nityam cha samachittatvamishtaanishtopapattishu || 9 ||

asakti : non attachment
 anabhishvangaha : lack of identification
 nityam : constantly
 cha : and
 samachittatvam : equanimity of mind
 ishtaanishta : favourable or unfavourable
 upapattishu : in attainment of

Remaining unattached, without identification with one's son, spouse, home and others, and constant equanimity of mind when favourable or unfavourable (situations) are attained.

Shri Krishna adds three more qualities that help us reduce importance of the kshetra in this shloka. The first one is asakti, a detached attitude towards people, objects and situations. Aasakti is extreme attachment whereas asakti is lack of attachment. Only when we are away from our daily routine, perhaps on vacation or on a retreat, do we know our level of dependence, and even addiction, to objects, people and situations. Beginning from a cup of coffee in the morning to television in the evening, we rely on external factors to give us joy, and conversely, experience sorrow when they are not available for our enjoyment.

A particularly difficult type of attachment is the strong identification we have with our immediate family and home, which is why Shri Krishna has specifically called it out in this shloka. "Abhishvangaha" is the placement of our future comfort, joy and happiness in our spouse, our children and our home. It is the thought that "in my old age, I do not have to worry, my spouse, or my child will take care of everything, and I can retire in my house peacefully". This kind of identification is one step worse than attachment, because we do not see any difference between us and our spouse, our children and our home. Any sorrow that affects our spouse becomes our own sorrow. We should of course partake in joy and sorrow with our family members, but only to the extent of our responsibilities. If we go overboard, we will not be able to negate this aspect of kshetra, and consequently, not be able to contemplate the eternal essence. "Anabhishvangaha" is one who can remain detached in this situation.

The third quality mentioned here is "samachittatvam", maintaining equanimity of mind in favourable or unfavourable situations. Shri Krishna has stressed this quality repeatedly in various contexts. Even in the very beginning, in the second chapter, he praised equanimity by saying "samatvam yoga ucchyate". Now, he urges us to maintain this attitude at all times. This can only work if we figure out how to pre-

vent our mind from labelling situations as favourable or unfavourable. One way of doing so is to submit all the results of actions to Ishvara as an offering, and accept any situation as a blessing from him. We can also train our mind through intense meditation to stop this sort of labelling.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 13

mayi chaananyayogena bhaktiravyabhicharini |
viviktadeshasevitoamaratirjanasamsadi || 10 ||

mayi : in me
 cha : and
 ananyayogena : single-pointed yoga
 bhakti : devotion
 avyabhicharini : unwavering
 viviktadesha : solitary locations
 sevitam : going to
 aratihi : disinterest
 janasamsadi : assembly of people

Single-pointed devotion in me through unwavering yoga, going to solitary locations and disinterest in the assembly of people.

Shri Krishna adds three further attributes that help us reduce the impact of the field or the kshetra. He stresses upon the importance of single-pointed devotion by bringing up the word "vyabhichari". At one level it means wavering or unsteady, but at another level it refers to someone who is unfaithful to their spouse. True devotion to Ishvara has to be "avyabhichari" or unwavering, where there is no "anya", no other goal such as getting good marks in our exams, or generating extra profit in our business. We only ask such material goals when we doubt the omniscience, the all-knowing nature of Ishvara.

"Vivikta desha" refers to a location that is pure and conducive to meditation and contemplation. But this does not suggest retiring to a forest. It means finding a time and place everyday where we can be free of distractions such as cell phones, television and Internet. If we are constantly pulled into the world by such distractions, contemplation upon Ishvara becomes impossible. But if we spend ten to fifteen minutes without any distractions, and make it a habit, we will automatically begin the process of quietening our mind and contemplating upon Ishvara.

"Jana samsad" means assembly of people. And we all know that wherever two or three people meet without any agenda, there is going to be discussion about all the goings on in the world, or even gossip. This assembly of people forces one to join in the conversation and again get sucked into praakrita or material interests. Now "ratihi" means one who revels. So therefore, one who prefers not to indulge in such gossip is called "janasamsadi aratihi". In fact, as our devotion towards Ishvara increases, interest for external stimuli, including meeting constantly, will slowly subside.

Shri Krishna adds two more attributes in the next shloka to conclude this topic.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 13

*adhyaatmajnyaanam nityatvam tattvajnyaanarthadarshanam |
etajjnyaanam iti proktam ajnyaanam yadatonyathaa || 11 ||*

Steadfastness in the knowledge of the self, contemplation on the goal of the knowledge of reality. This has been spoken of as knowledge. That which is other than this is ignorance.

Shri Krishna adds two final entries to the list of twenty attributes that help us reduce the importance we give to the kshetra or the field. "Adhyaatma" refers to the self, the "I" in us. "Jnyaanam" is knowledge, and "nityatvam" is constant dwelling in that knowledge. For instance, once we know that the sun is a star and that the earth revolves around it, we never forget it, even when we appreciate the beauty of a sunrise or a sunset. Similarly, we can mourn the loss of a loved one, without letting that incident obscure our knowledge that the human body is ephemeral.

"Tattva jnyana artha" is the goal or the culmination of the knowledge of reality, which is moksha or liberation. We will constantly contemplate on the self only if we feel that liberation is worthwhile, that it is valuable. On the other hand, if we value material goals more than liberation, we will waver in our commitment to inquiring about the self. Therefore, if we are able to make liberation our end goal, we will easily practice all the other attributes that we have studied in the previous few shlokas.

Shri Krishna concludes this topic by asserting that what has been spoken of so far is the means of knowledge, it is jnyaanam. Anything that does not provide this means of knowledge is ignorance, it is ajnyaanam, it will only serve to further entangle us in the material world. For instance, if we practice arrogance instead of humility, that is out of ignorance. It will lead us away from the path of liberation. We are urged to lead an intelligent, ignorance-free life in the Gita, right from the beginning when Shri Krishna glorified buddhi yoga in the second chapter.

So then, if all this was the means of knowledge, what knowledge does it reveal to us? This topic is taken up next.

adhyaatmajnyaanam : knowledge of the self
nityatvam : steadfastness
tattvajnyana : knowledge of reality
artha : goal
darshanam : contemplation
etat : all this
jnyaanam : is knowledge
iti : this
proktam : has been spoken
ajnyaanam : ignorance
yat : that which
ataha : of this
anyathaa : other than

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 13

*jneyam yattatpravakshyaami yajjnyaatvaamritamashnute |
anaadimatparam brahma na sattannaasaduchyate || 12 ||*

I will describe that which is to be known, by realizing which, immortality is attained. The supreme brahman is without beginning, said to be neither manifest nor unmanifest.

In the beginning of this chapter, Shri Krishna set out to explain what is kshetra or the field, and what is kshetrajnya or the knower of the field. He then set to list out various aspects of the field, which are also known as upaadhis or conditionings. This list included upaadhis such as the intellect, the mind, the five elements and so on. Shri Krishna also asserted there is only one knower of the field that is limited or conditioned by all of these upaadhis. He then gave us twenty attributes that we should cultivate in order to reduce the importance we give to these upaadhis, so that we can slowly uncover and get to the kshetrajnya, the knower of the field.

After assuming that we have cultivated these twenty qualities, and consequently learned how to reduce the importance of the field in our lives, Shri Krishna now gets to the main topic of this chapter. He says that he will now reveal what is the real knowledge, what all of us should know in this world as the culmination of all of our knowledge, what is "jneyam". We learn so many things in our life through schools, colleges, professional training, street smarts and so on. But none of them can give us immortality. None of them can give us a permanent solution from the sorrows that we experience day in and day out. Each time we leave our self and go through our senses into the world to fulfill a desire, we generate sorrow, we create "death" in each such departure.

So then, what is this immortality-giving knowledge? Shri Krishna says that it is brahman, which is the very same eternal essence that is within us, and within everything else in the universe. It is "param" or supreme, beyond which nothing else needs to be known. It is "anadimat", eternal, without any beginning, beyond all notions of time. It is not manifest, which means it is not accessible to the senses or the mind as an object of perception or a thought. But it is also not unmanifest. For instance, our unfulfilled desires lie dormant in our unconscious mind, but do not manifest as thoughts in our mind. The eternal

jneyam : known
yat : which
tat : that
pravakshyaami : I will describe
yat : which
jnyaatvaa : having realized
amritam : immortality
ashnute : attain
anaadimat : without beginning
param : supreme
brahma : brahman
na : not
sat : manifest
tat : that
na : not
asat : unmanifest
uchyate : said

essence is beyond our unconscious as well.

We now see why it is so difficult to understand the eternal essence. It is not like any object or form that can be described in words. It is also not an abstract concept that can be explained through logic, or by comparing it to something else or by combining one concept with another. In earlier chapters we saw how such situations can be handled with negation. If we want to instruct someone on how to select a maroon shirt, we tell them ignore all of the other colours of shirts. The one that is left will be the maroon shirt. Similarly, the eternal essence cannot be comprehended by our mind and senses because it is beyond the mind and senses. It can only be attained through negating everything that is not the eternal essence - by negating the upaadhis or fields.

Now, in the upcoming shlokas, Shri Krishna proceeds step by step to negate the upaadhis of the eternal essence, starting with the most visible ones.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 13

sarvatahapaanipaadam tatsarvatokshishiromukham |
sarvatahashrutimalloke sarvamaavritya tishthati || 13 ||

sarvataha : everywhere
 paanipaadam : hands and legs
 tat : it
 sarvataha : everywhere
 sarvataha : everywhere
 shrutimat : eyes
 loke : worlds
 sarvam : everywhere
 aavritya : pervading
 tishthati : established

With hands and legs everywhere, with eyes, heads and mouths everywhere, with ears everywhere, it is established in all the worlds, pervading all.

How does a child come to learn about electricity? The teacher does not directly tell him that "electricity is defined as a form of energy resulting from the existence of charged particles such as electrons or protons". The teacher uses what the child already knows and imparts the knowledge to him step by step. So the teacher may first say that to the child: wherever you see bright light in a bulb, that is electricity. Once the child has grasped this concept, then the teacher may say: wherever you see wires connected, that is electricity. Slowly, as the child is able to understand the nuances of atoms and electrons, the teacher then reveals to him the technical definition.

Shri Krishna uses a similar process to gently reveal the nature of brahman, the eternal essence, also known as "jnyeyam" or the knowable, to us. Now, it is quite easy for us to see action and sentience - the power to experience things - in living creatures everywhere. So Shri Krishna says that wherever we see action in living beings, symbolically represented by the phrase "hands and legs", we should recognize the presence of the eternal essence. Furthermore, wherever we see sentience in living beings, symbolically represented by the phrase "eyes, heads, mouths and ears", we should recognize the presence of the eternal essence.

Going back to the example of the child learning electricity, the child may sometimes think that the electricity in a bulb is different than the electricity in a fan, or that the bulb limits the flow of electricity to the fan. To remove any similar misconceptions about the eternal essence, Shri Krishna says that the eternal essence pervades everywhere. In other words, it is only one eternal essence that is functioning through the organs of knowledge and action of all living creatures in all of the worlds, and that one organ does not limit the functioning of the eternal essence in another organ.

An example commonly used to illustrate this notion is that of space

and pot-space. The space that is in a clay pot and the space outside it is the same. But just because the walls of the pot surround it, we label the space inside as "pot-space". The pot is a classic example of an upaadhi, something that as though limits the space in it, but does not do so in reality. Space, then, pervades all pots. Similarly, the organs of all living creatures may seem to limit the eternal essence, but not so in reality.

Having established the starting point for realizing the eternal essence, Shri Krishna goes one step further in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 13

*sarvendriyagunaabhaasam sarvendriyavivarjitam |
asaktam sarvabhritchaiva nirgunam gunabhoktri cha || 14 ||*

Illuminating the sense functions, yet devoid of the senses. Unattached, yet the supporter of all. Without qualities, and also experienter of qualities.

sarvendriyagunaabhaasam : illuminating sense functions
sarvendriyavivarjitam : devoid of the senses
asaktam : unattached
sarvabhrit : supporter of all
cha : and
eva : also
nirgunam : without qualities
gunabhoktri : experienter of qualities
cha : and

When we teach a child about electricity, it is natural to have some doubts or questions about the nature of electricity. Similarly, when we hear a description of the eternal essence, we also will have questions and doubts. Shri Krishna now continues to proceed step by step towards explaining jneyam, the knowable which is the eternal essence, by answering three questions with respect to its relationship with the organs of sense (eyes, mouth etc) and organs of action (hands, legs etc).

First question: Can the eternal essence exist without the organs? Shri Krishna says that the eternal essence can exist without the organs of action and sense, it is "devoid of the senses", just like electricity can exist without the bulb. Organs of sense and action are one of the means by which the eternal essence expresses itself. It has the power to adapt itself to any form of expression, any upaadhi, just like electricity can power a heater as well as an air conditioner.

Then, can the organs of sense and action exist without the eternal essence? The answer is no, since the eternal essence is "sarvabhrit", the supporter of all upaadhis in the form of "is-ness" or existence. In any language including English, we cannot say something exists without using the word "is" in some shape or form. The "is-ness" of everything is provided by the eternal essence, like the water provides "is-ness" to the wave. But the eternal essence always remains "asakta" or detached from the upaadhis, just like a movie screen remains detached from the movie.

Now, we know from earlier chapters that the senses are made up of the three qualities or gunaas : sattva, rajas and tamas. They go out into the world to chase sense objects, which are also made up of the very same gunaas. "Gunaa guneshu vartante", the qualities are playing with the qualities. How does the eternal essence fit into this play of the senses?

Shri Krishna says that even these three qualities are upaadhis, and

therefore, the eternal essence is "nirgunam", not attached to these qualities. When the senses play with their sense objects, the upaadhis of sattva, rajas and tamas are transformed into the upaadhis of joy, sorrow, delusion and so on. The mind, when it participates in this process, becomes the experiencer on account of presence of the eternal essence.

In all of these three answers, we find that the eternal essence is always unattached, whether it is to the organs of sense and actions, to their sense objects or to the three qualities. But when the eternal essence takes on the conditioning or the upaadhi of the organs, it as though moves, and it as though supports their existence. Also, when the eternal essence takes on the upaadhis of the three gunaas, it as though becomes the experiencer. The key here is the phrase "as though", since this addition or superimposition of upaadhis is only due to ignorance.

Let us now recap Shri Krishna's explanation so far. In the last shloka, he said that the eternal essence is that which has hands, legs, eyes, mouth etc. In this shloka, he says that the eternal essence is that which has hands, legs, eyes, mouth etc as upaadhis or conditionings. In other words, he first said that the organs exist, and now he negates them by making them upaadhis. This process of assertion and negation is a technique known as "adhyaropa apavaada", a step by step means of getting closer and closer to the eternal essence.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 13

*bahirantashcha bhootaanaamacharam chameva cha |
sookshmatvaattadavijneyam doorastham chaantike cha tat || 15 ||*

Existing outside and inside all beings, moving as well as non-moving. It is very subtle, so it is beyond comprehension. It is distant, yet it is near.

As Shri Krishna lists the indicators of the eternal essence, we may be tempted to start looking for it with our eyes, just like we look for a lost object in the house. However, we need to continuously remind ourselves that the eternal essence is neither an object nor a concept that can be grasped by the mind. Shri Krishna uses the Upanishadic style of describing the eternal essence through contradictions and paradoxes in this sequence of shlokas, and especially in the current shloka.

The first contradiction mentioned is that the eternal essence is both inside and outside all inert and living entities. This point cautions us against conceptualizing the eternal essence as limited by space, as if it is only available in one location and not the other. A somewhat crude analogy is mobile phone signals, which are essentially radio waves. Radio waves are all-pervasive and they penetrate all solid objects, enabling us to make phone calls from inside as well as outside buildings.

The second contradiction is that the eternal essence is to be known as the ultimate knowledge, yet it is beyond comprehension, due to its subtle nature. Using the radio waves analogy, we can say that none of our senses can detect radio waves. But if we know how to build a device that can access radio waves, we can harness their power to our advantage. Similarly, the eternal essence remains beyond the comprehension of those who have not purified their mind. But for those who have purified their mind, and followed a systematic method of enquiry under the guidance of scriptures and a teacher, it is ever accessible.

This leads us to the third contradiction. For those who have enquired about the nature of the eternal essence systematically, it is immediately available at all times as the self, the "I" within us. But for those who are ignorant, it is far away. Shankaraacharya says that it is unattainable even in millions of years for such people. Whenever we focus on names and forms, we lose sight of the self. But when we remove the upadhis of names and forms, we come back to the self, the "I", that is

bahihi : outside
antaha : inside
cha : and
bhootaanaam : all beings
acharam : non-moving
charam : moving
eva : also
cha : and
sookshmatvaat : very subtle
tat : it
avijneyam : beyond comprehension
doorastham : distant
cha : and
antike : near
cha : and
tat : it

behind all the names and forms, just like the movie screen.

Note that any time we use analogies such as radio waves, we are trying to conceptualize the eternal essence which is beyond all conception. We need to consider such analogies as helpful pointers, and nothing more.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 13

*avibhaktam cha bhooteshu vibhaktamiva cha sthitham |
bhootabhartri cha tajjneyam grasishnu prabhavishnu cha || 16 ||*

And undivided, yet it exists as though divided in all beings. That, which is to be known, is the nourisher of beings. It is the devourer, and it is the creator also.

Shri Krishna continues to elaborate upon the topic of jneyam, that which is to be known, which is brahman, the eternal essence. Here he further describes the distortion created by upaadhis or conditionings in our understanding of the eternal essence. He begins by asserting that the eternal essence is undivided, it is unbroken and continuous. It cannot be chopped up into pieces. But due to the effect of space as an upaadhi, it appears as if the eternal essence exists differently in various beings.

We can go back to the example of the clay pot and space. If we have a hundred pots on the floor, it appears as though the space in the room is divided into a hundred "pot-spaces", due to the boundary created by the wall of each pot. But in reality, space can never be divided or chopped up. Or we can also look at the example of electricity, which looks like it functions differently in each appliance, but is really one continuous circuit that begins at the power plant. If our senses cannot access upaadhis such as pots or appliances, they mistakenly assume that subtle things such as space and electricity are absent. Similarly, the body of a living entity serves as an upaadhi where we can feel the presence of the eternal essence.

So if there is only one continuous and undivided eternal essence, how do we account for all of the creation, sustenance, and destruction of names and forms in the universe? Shri Krishna says that ultimately, it is the eternal essence that provides the foundation for the lifecycle of the universe. Waves are created, sustained and dissolved back into the ocean. If we pay attention to the waves, we lose sight of the ocean that is one undivided foundation which is behind all of the waves. We come back to the same point again : the eternal essence provides existence, the "is-ness", to all names and forms in the universe.

Now, if the eternal essence cannot be comprehended by the senses, is it dark and empty like a black hole? This is clarified in the next

avibhaktam : undivided
cha : and
bhooteshu : all beings
vibhaktam : divided
eva : as though
cha : and
sthitham : exist
bhootabhartri : nourisher of beings
cha : and
tat : that
jneyam : to be known
grasishnu : devourer
prabhavishnu : creator
cha : and

shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 13

*jyotishaamapi tajjyotistamsaha paramuchyate |
jnyaanam jnyeyam jnyaanagamyam hridi sarvasya vishthitam || 17 ||*

That is the light even among all the lights, and it has been spoken of as beyond darkness. It is knowledge, that which is to be known, and the goal of knowledge. It especially resides in the hearts of all.

jyotishaam : among all lights
api : even
tat : that
jyotihi : light
tamsaha : darkness
param : beyond
uchyate : has been spoken
jnyaanam : knowledge
jnyeyam : that which is to be known
jnyaanagamyam : goal of knowledge
hridi : hearts
sarvasya : all
vishthitam : especially resides

In prior verses, the "sat" or existence aspect of the eternal essence was highlighted. Here, the "chit" or awareness aspect is elaborated upon. Awareness or sentience is what makes an entity know about its surroundings as well about itself, as we had seen earlier. Shri Krishna says that the eternal essence is the "light among all the lights". The word "light" in the Vedas refers to awareness, to knowledge. Which means that ultimately, it is the eternal essence that provides the power of awareness, the power to know, to all beings. Without the eternal essence, we would have no awareness, no sentience.

Imagine a classroom of students that are taking an examination. The student on the last bench can see all of the students in front of him. The student seated in the second to last row can see other students, but not the last row student. Also, the student in the front row cannot see the student in the last row. The awareness provided by the eternal essence is like the student in the last row. The next student is the intellect, followed by the mind and the senses. In other words, the eternal essence gives awareness to the intellect, which gives it to the mind, and then to the senses. But the mind, intellect and senses cannot immediately contact the eternal essence.

Now, just like the word "light" refers to knowledge, the word "darkness" refers to ignorance. By saying that the eternal essence is beyond ignorance, Shri Krishna points out the uniqueness of the awareness aspect of the eternal essence. If we light a lamp in a dark room, it dispels the darkness. We cannot have darkness and light coexist. However, the eternal essence is present in individuals who are ignorant of it, as well as those few rare individuals who have realized it. This unique ability of the eternal essence to illumine ignorance is why Shri Krishna calls it "beyond darkness".

So, how can we use our antahakarana, our intellect, mind and senses, to realize that eternal essence? Shri Krishna provides a three step pro-

cess. We use "jnyaanam", the means of knowledge indicated in the twenty attributes such as humility mentioned earlier in the chapter, to gradually reduce the importance we give to upaadhis or conditionings. As we systematically study the scriptures under the guidance of a teacher, the eternal essence comes into our awareness as "jneyam", the object of knowledge. But only through constant contemplation, reflection and meditation does the eternal essence becomes "jnyaanagamyam", the goal of knowledge, where all notions of duality are removed and we remain established in the eternal essence.

Shri Krishna concludes this shloka by reminding us that all these three stages - preparation, study and reflection - are enabled only through the intellect, which is referred to here as the "hridi" or heart of all human beings. Only humans have the capability to access the eternal essence. That is why we come across the statement "a human birth is rare to attain" in many prominent spiritual texts.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 13

*iti kshetram tathaa jnyaanam jneyam choktam samaasataha |
madbhakta etadvijnyaaya madbhaavaayopapadyate || 18 ||*

iti : in this manner
kshetram : the field
tathaa : as well as
jnyaanam : knowledge
jneyam : which is to be known
cha : and
uktam : has been described
samaasataha : in brief
madbhaktaha : my devotee
etat : this
vijnyaaya : understanding
madbhaavaaya : my state
upapadyate : qualified

In this manner, the field, as well as knowledge, and that which is to be known, has been described in brief. By understanding this, my devotee becomes qualified to attain my state.

Shri Krishna concludes the current topic in this shloka. He spoke about "kshetra", the field, in shlokas five and six. The field comprises twenty four aspects which are the building blocks of the universe. This includes the five great elements, the intellect and others. The field also comprises seven modifications by which the individual comes into contact with the world. These include desire, hatred and others. The field works like a machine, but is devoid of awareness in itself and is inert. It need to borrow awareness from some other source. This source is the eternal essence, it is "jneyam", that which is to be known. The field acts as an upaadhi, something which as though limits and conditions the eternal essence.

If we are attracted by the dance of an ocean's waves, we will never be able to appreciate the grandeur and beauty of the entire ocean, because our attention will be on the waves which are upaadhis that as though limit our understanding of the ocean. Similarly, if we need to understand the eternal essence, we have to learn how to gradually minimize the impact of the upaadhis of the field, and shift our attention to the eternal essence. "Jnyaanam", the means of knowledge that enables us to mentally remove these upaadhis, is elaborated in shlokas seven to eleven.

Once we have learnt how to mentally remove upaadhis, we are ready to understand the eternal essence. From shlokas twelve to seventeen, Shri Krishna uses paradoxes and contradictions to explain the nature of the eternal essence. Our intellect is a product of the field, and will never grasp what the eternal essence is. Paradoxical statements like "it is near, yet it is far" are used so that our intellect doesn't mistakenly turn the eternal essence into yet another concept.

Shri Krishna says that those who have inquired into the eternal essence in the manner prescribed above are qualified to attain the state of Ishvara, which is liberation. But this state cannot be attained unless we

become devotees of Ishvara. A devotee means one who knows that whatever he sees, hears or touches is nothing but Ishvara, and that Ishvara is residing in him as his self. Only one who has such a firm conviction through meditation that everything, including himself, is ultimately Ishvara, will attain liberation.

Now, does all this explanation help me understand what ultimately causes me to experience sorrow in my life? In the next shloka, Shri Krishna begins a new topic to explain this issue in detail.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 13

*prakritim purusham chaiva viddhyanaadi ubhaavapi |
vikaaraanshcha gunaanshchaiva viddhi prakritisambhavaan | | 19 | |*

Know that surely, both Prakriti and Purusha are without beginning. Also, know that in fact, all modifications and qualities are born of Prakriti.

Shri Krishna now describes how we fall into the trap of samsaara, the cycle of birth and death. In many respects, this topic is a continuation of the discussion of higher and lower prakriti from the seventh chapter. Let us quickly recap what we saw there. We learnt about two aspects of Ishvara, the lower and the higher. The lower nature comprises the five elements plus the mind, ego and intellect. The higher nature comprises the life-giving force which is also the experiencer, the subject. In this manner, Ishvara is established as the ultimate cause of the universe.

Here, the lower nature is termed "Prakriti" and the higher nature is termed "Purusha". First, Shri Krishna says that both these aspects of Ishvara are without beginning, they are eternal. This is because Ishvara himself is eternal, so it logically follows that his aspects must also be eternal. But we also have to note that something which has no beginning can have an end. We will come back to this point later in the discussion.

The second statement here states that all modifications and qualities are born out of Prakriti. Maaya and prakriti refer to the same thing. Prakriti is a power wielded by Ishvara. It is beyond the comprehension of our intellect since our intellect itself is a product of Prakriti. The only way to understand Prakriti is to think of it as a magician's illusion. This Prakriti gives rise to five elements that produce the entire visible universe. These combinations or modifications of Prakriti are termed as "vikaaraas". Prakriti also comprises the three "gunaas" or qualities which are sattva, rajas and tamas. These qualities manifest as mental states such as happiness, sorrow and attachment.

In other words, if we go back in time, if we press the rewind button, we will see that everything merges back into Prakriti, everything has come from Prakriti. Now, let us get practical. Whenever we experience emotions such as sorrow, grief, anger and so on, it is Prakriti

prakritim : prakriti
purusham : purusha
cha : and
eva : surely
viddhi : know
anaadi : without beginning
ubhau : both
api : also
vikaaraan : modifications
cha : and
gunaas : qualities
cha : and
eva : in fact
viddhi : know
prakritisambhavaan : born of prakriti

that creates it, not the self, not the "I". This is what was explained in the shloka. But, when anger arises in our mind, for instance, we always say "I am angry". How do we come to the conclusion that the "I" is angry when it is Prakriti that created the anger? This is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 13

*kaaryakaranakartritve hetuhu prakritiruchyate |
purushaha sukhaduhkhaanaam bhoktritve heturuchyate || 20 ||*

With regard to the source of actions in the body and its instruments, Prakriti is said to be the cause. With regard to experiencing joy and sorrow, Purusha is said to be the cause.

kaarya : body
karana : instruments
kartritve : source of actions
hetuhu : cause
prakriti : Prakriti
uchyate : it is said
purushaha : Purusha
sukhaduhkhaanaam : joy and sorrow
bhoktritve : experience
hetuhu : cause
uchyate : it is said

Let us bring back the example of the movie projector from the seventh chapter so that we can better understand this shloka. Imagine a gigantic IMAX screen on which Prakriti or nature projects the life of every human being in the world. Think of it as the world's largest soap opera. We can now examine the first half of this shloka. It shows what Prakriti can create through its projections. It can project "kaarya", the body of a person. It can project "karana", the instruments of the body which include the five organs of sense, five organs of actions, the mind, the intellect and the ego. It can not just project one body, but every body in the world.

Now, here comes an important point. Shri Krishna says that Prakriti is the source of all actions in this world, not the Purusha. We are now coming back to the topic that was hinted upon in the karma yoga chapter. Typically, most of us attribute the agency, or the doership of our actions, to our own self. We say "I did this", "I did not do that" and so on. Shri Krishna makes it perfectly clear that the intellect, the ego and the mind in our body receive input from our senses, filter it through our vaasanaas, and send instructions to our organs of action. All this is going on within the realm of Prakriti, that continues projecting the IMAX movie of the world. In other words, the "I" does not do anything, but Prakriti does everything.

Next, the role of the Purusha is described. The Purusha is the awareness principle, the knowledge principle present in the body. From our perspective, he is concerned with the experience of only one body out of the millions of bodies in that IMAX movie - our body. What is his role? His role is to know. If we put a drop of a bitter liquid on our tongue, it sends an electrical current to the mind based on the chemical makeup of the bitter liquid. But ultimately, it is only the Purusha that has the capacity to come up with the knowledge that "this liquid is bitter". On one level, Purusha knows what the senses and the mind report. Without the Purusha, there will be nothing to know what

Prakriti has projected. It would be like projecting a movie without an audience to see it.

So then, when this knowledge of bitterness is filtered through our vaasanaas or our "programming", it can result in either joy or sorrow. Some of us like bitter taste, some of us don't. This difference comes from the variety in our vaasanaas, our individual programming. So whenever external objects are arranged by Prakriti in a pattern that is conducive to our vaasanaas, the Purusha experiences joy. In other words, whenever we say "I am happy", it is the Purusha experiencing happiness. Similarly, sorrow is also experienced when objects are undesirable.

Here, encapsulated in these two lines of this shloka, is the state of our lives. Our body with its organs interacts with other bodies in this world. It performs actions whose results are experienced by the Purusha as joy and sorrow. The cycle of joy and sorrow continues from one action to another action, from one experience to another experience. This is "samsaara".

Now, there seems to be a problem. Right from the second chapter, we have been told that our true nature is the eternal essence. It pervades the entire universe. It is eternal, indestructible and indivisible. We have also been told that Prakriti, through some inexplicable magic, projects the entire universe of names and forms. How then, does the third entity called Purusha come into being? And also, how does it take on one body out of all the bodies in the world as its own, and experience only that body's joy and sorrow?

Shri Krishna reveals the root cause of samsaara, of our repeated experience of joy and sorrow, in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 21, Chapter 13

*purushaha prakritistho hi bhungkte prakritijaangunaan |
kaaranam gunasangosya sadasadyonijanasu || 21 ||*

Purusha, when seated in Prakriti, experiences the qualities born of Prakriti. Attachment to these qualities is the cause of his birth in good and evil wombs.

purushaha : Purusha
prakritisthaha : seated in Prakriti
hi : only
bhungkte : experiences
prakritijaan : born of Prakriti
gunaan : qualities
kaaranam : cause
gunasangaha : attachment to qualities
asya : his
sadasadyonijanasu : birth in good
and evil wombs

Imagine that two young brothers and their grandmother are watching a boxing match on TV. One brother is a huge fan of boxer A, and the other brother of boxer B. The two brothers get so involved in the match that they feel they themselves are in the boxing ring. The brothers start throwing punches in the air, mimicking the actions of the boxers. Also, when boxer A punches boxer B, the first brother feels exhilaration whereas the second brother feels pain. All this time, their grandmother is watching the match without any of these reactions.

This involvement with the boxers doesn't end with the match. Boxer A always likes to wear a headband, so the first brother starts to wear headbands in the house. Boxer B always snaps his fingers at the end of every sentence, so the second brother begins to do that as well, much to the annoyance of his parents. Both the brothers have become so infatuated with their boxers that they take on their likes and dislikes. We may think that such behaviour only happens with children and teenagers, but something similar has happened to all of us, causing us to get trapped in samsara.

We are stuck twice in samsaraa. First, Shri Krishna says that the eternal essence has mistakenly identified itself with one body due to avidyaa or ignorance, just like the brother identified himself with boxer A. Instead of watching the IMAX movie of the universe like the grandmother, we get stuck to one character in that movie. When the eternal essence as though gets deluded with ignorance, it becomes the Purusha, and becomes "seated in Prakriti". It forgets its real nature as infinite, indivisible and blissful. It assumes the properties of our body and thinks itself to be finite, divisible and sorrowful.

Second, having identified with a finite body, having taken the "upadhi" or conditioning of a body, we get attached to the play of Prakriti, the play of the three gunas or qualities. We get so attached to the forms of Prakriti that we generate selfish desires in order to repeat-

edly contact these forms, which are nothing but objects and people. Seeking a shinier car is a mistaken attempt to find joy in the car instead of understanding our true nature as joy itself. We become the brother who starts wearing a headband to feel happy, just because boxer A does so, when the brother was happy even before he knew what boxing was.

So then, how do we get out of this two step problem of samsara which causes us to "take birth in good and evil wombs"? We solve step one - attachment to gunas - through vairagya or dispassion, we learn to slowly wean ourselves off the influence of the three gunas. We then solve step two - ignorance of our true nature - through jnyana or knowledge, when we learn of our real nature as the eternal essence and internalize it through meditation.

An illustration of Purusha getting entangled in Prakriti is taken up next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 22, Chapter 13

upadrashtaanumantaa cha bhartaa bhoktaa maheshvaraha |
paramaatmeti chaapyukto dehesmin purushaha paraha || 22 ||

He who is the witness, the permitter, the nourisher, the experiencer, the master and who is also spoken of as the supreme self, is the supreme Purusha in this body.

Imagine that your grandfather comes to stay in your apartment for a short vacation. Seeing a new senior citizen in the building, the apartment complex association invites him to one of their cultural programs. Your grandfather thoroughly enjoys it. Next, the association asks him permission to host their next weekly meeting in your apartment, which he readily agrees to. He is so excited about the meeting that he prepares tea and snacks for them. By the next weekly meeting, he has become so involved in the association meetings that he feels the need to vote on issues that he strongly feels about. He gets so involved that it is just a matter of time before he is elected president of the apartment complex association.

Your grandfather, who had nothing whatsoever to do with the building, started out as a pure witness, then become the permitter, nourisher, experiencer and subsequently the master of the building association. Similarly, Shri Krishna says that the eternal essence that has nothing whatsoever to do with Prakriti, develops a strong identification with a body. By taking various upaadhis or conditionings such as the body, the mind, the vital forces, the intellect and so on, it becomes the permitter, the nourisher, the experiencer and the master of this body, just like your grandfather took on various roles as a member of the apartment complex association.

Practically speaking, we don't need to worry too much about this. All that we need to know that we don't have to go out into the world hunting for Ishvara. Ishvara is resident in our body as the permitter, nourisher, experiencer and so on. He is the paramaatmaa, the supreme self resident as the "I" in all beings. This is how we have to understand what Purusha means. The more we pay attention to the Ishvara aspect in us, the less importance we give to the upaadhis, especially the ego. People who have reached the pinnacle of their spiritual journey eventually lose their individuality and themselves become the universal witness, the upadrashtaa, remaining unaffected by the goings on

upadrashtaa : witness
 anumantaa : permitter
 cha : and
 bhartaa : nourisher
 bhoktaa : experiencer
 maheshvaraha : master
 paramaatmaa : supreme self
 iti : in this manner
 cha : and
 api : also
 uktaha : spoken
 dehe : body
 asmin : this
 purushaha : Purusha
 paraha : supreme

of Prakriti.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 23, Chapter 13

*ya evam vetti purusham prakritim cha gunaih saha |
sarvathaa vartamaanopi na sa bhooyobhijaayate || 23 ||*

He who thus knows Purusha and Prakriti, along with the gunaas, no matter what his conduct, is never born again.

To better understand this shloka, let us quickly take a look at the theory of karma. It says that each of us comes with three types of karmas, which are unfulfilled desires that become seeds of future actions. Total karmas or "sanchita" karmas are the entire stock of our karmas. Present life karmas or "prarabdha" karmas are those karmas that are activated in our present life. Expected karmas or "agaami" karmas are those karmas that will be generated due to the results of actions in the present life. These karmas get added to our sanchita karmas, our stock of karmas.

As an illustration, consider this. The arrows in an archer's quiver are sanchita karmas, the arrows that have left his bow are prarabdha karmas, and the arrows that are loaded on the bow are agaami karmas. The Vedas assert that so long as an individual maintains a stock of karmas, he has to take on a body to exhaust those karmas. In each birth, a portion of the stock of karmas is allocated to the individual so that he can exhaust them. By generating further selfish desires, the individual adds to his stock of karmas, and the cycle of birth goes on indefinitely.

Shri Krishna says that the one who has properly understood the relationship between Purusha and Prakriti, one who has understood the identification of the eternal essence with Prakriti due to ignorance and the consequent rushing after the gunaas, is never born again. This means that his stock of karmas is destroyed, just like a spark of fire destroys dry hay. He does not generate any further selfish desires, because he is no longer fascinated by the play of the three gunaas. Why does this happen? When one realizes that selfish desire is created by ignorance of one's true nature, it wipes out any notion of selfishness completely. There is no longer an urge to come into contact with Prakriti.

Now, this person still has to deal with his prarabdha. His present life karmas continue to be active until his body drops off, after which he

yaha : he who
evam : thus
veti : knows
purusham : Purusha
prakritim : Prakriti
cha : and
gunaih : gunaas
saha : along with
sarvathaa : whatever
vartamaanaha : conduct
api : no matter
na : not
saha : he
bhooyaha : again
abhijaayate : born

does not have to take any further births. The word "api" in the shloka indicates that the individual can continue to perform his duties even if he has realized his true nature as the eternal essence, just like king Janaka continued to rule his kingdom even though he had achieved liberation.

Shri Krishna concludes the topic of Purusha and Prakriti with this shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 24, Chapter 13

*dhyaanenaatmani pashyanti kechidaatmaanamaatmanaa |
 anye saankhyena yogena karmayogena chaapare || 24 ||*

Some behold the self in the self by the self through meditation, others through Saankhya and yoga, and others do so through karma yoga.

dhyaanena : through meditation
 atmani : by the self
 pashyanti : behold
 kechit : some
 atmaanam : the self
 atmanaa : in the self
 anye : others
 saankhyena : through Saankhya
 yogena : yoga
 karmayogena : through karma yoga
 cha : and
 apare : others

So far, it seems like we have studied two unrelated topics in our study of the Gita. On one hand, we studied techniques such as saankhya yoga, karma yoga, dhyaana yoga or meditation and bhakti yoga as techniques to access Ishvara. On the other hand, we came across the two-fold downfall of the Purusha, through ignorance of our true nature and subsequent attachment to the gunaas or qualities. In this shloka and the next, Shri Krishna methodically connects these seemingly unrelated topics.

Before we are ready to remove the ignorance of our true nature, we need to deal with our attachment to the three gunaas of Prakriti. In simple terms, we need to deal with our selfish desires. The technique of dealing with our selfish desires depends upon the capability of the seeker. Shri Krishna says that the most advanced seeker has mastered the technique of dhyaana yoga or meditation. They can directly contact the eternal essence "in the self through the self", which means that they can access the eternal essence through their intellect. This topic was covered in the sixth chapter.

For those who do not have mastery over meditation, saankhya yoga or the yoga of discrimination is recommended. This was the topic of the second chapter. Here, the seeker has great command over their intellect. They can constantly separate the eternal essence from the three gunas, the Purusha from Prakriti, through viveka or discrimination. "The three gunaas, sattva, rajas and tamas are objects of my perception, I am their witness, eternal and distinct from them." This is how they think all the time. Some commentators interpret the phrase "saankhya and yoga" to include "ashtanga yoga", which is the technique of accessing Ishvara through yogic exercises and breathing.

For those who cannot practise saankhya yoga or ashtanga yoga, karma yoga, the yoga of selfless action, is recommended. This was the topic of the third chapter. Most of us fit into this category. When actions are

performed with the idea of dedication to Ishvara, the mind is gradually purged of selfishness. Such a pure mind becomes ready to receive and internalize the knowledge of one's true nature described in the present chapter.

Now, what happens if we cannot follow any of these techniques? Shri Krishna explains the simplest technique in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 25, Chapter 13

*anye tvevamajaanantaha shrutvaanyebhya upaasate |
tepi chaatitarantyeva mrityum shrutiparaayanaahaa || 25 ||*

anye : others
tu : but
evam : this
ajaanantaha : do not know
shrutvaa : hearing
anyebhya : from others
upaasate : worship
te : they
api : too
cha : and
atitaranti : overcome
eva : surely
mrityum : death
shrutiparaayanaahaa : those who follow
what they hear

**But others, not knowing this, worship what they hear from others.
Those who follow what they have heard, they too overcome death.**

Whenever we want to learn something new, we do one of two things. We either listen to the advice of an expert, or read a book written by an expert. We study their teachings, we put their teachings into practice. Slowly, we begin to understand what they are talking about, and someday, become an expert ourselves. All this becomes possible only when we have faith in the teacher, and when we diligently follow their instructions. The forum in which we obtain knowledge through contact with knowers of that which is the ultimate reality, the "sanga" with the "sat", is known as "satsanga".

Shri Krishna says that if we are not qualified to follow any of the techniques mentioned in the previous shloka - dhyana, saankhya or karma yoga - we need not worry. We can obtain the same result of those techniques if we find a competent guru and diligently follow the path prescribed by them. Just hearing the teaching is not enough. If the doctor gives you a list of foods to avoid eating, you will not improve your health unless you follow their instructions. Similarly, we must become "shruti paraayanaha", uphold the teachings as the ultimate goal of our lives. Satsanga should become an integral part of our lives.

So then, what is the result of those who follow this path? They will be able to overcome death, in other words, they will achieve liberation. Death does not just refer to the loss of the physical body. Every time we get fascinated by the material world and rush to act with selfish desires, we forget our true nature and take on the role of a doer, an experiencer, a meritorious actor or "puntaatmaa" or a sinner. Each time we forget our true nature as the blissful eternal essence to rush out into the world and eventually experience sorrow, we "die" as it were. So therefore, Shri Krishna says that one who simply follows the instructions of their guru diligently will overcome death.

In these two shlokas, Shri Krishna covered the types of spiritual techniques required to access the Purusha within. He now begins a new

topic in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 26, Chapter 13

*yaavatsanjaayate kinchitsattvam sthaavarjangamam |
kshetrakshetrajnyasamyogaattadviddhi bharatarshabha || 26 ||*

Whatever being is born, inert or moving, know that to have come from the union of kshetra and kshetrajnya, O foremost among the Bharatas.

yaavat : whatever
sanjaayate : born
kinchit : any
sattvam : being
sthaavaraha : inert
jangamam : moving
kshetrakshetrajnyasamyogaat : union of
kshetra and kshetrajnya
tat : that
viddhi : know
bharatarshabha : O foremost among the
Bharatas

We now shift our attention from the nature of the "I" to the nature of the world. We may be able to experience our true nature as the saakshi, the witness, in deep meditation. But most of us still have to transact in this world, still deal with our friends, our relatives, our co-workers and so on. How should our attitude be towards the world after we have understood, at least in theory, what our true nature is? We cannot, and should not, think of ourselves as something special, and as everyone else as useless forms on an IMAX screen, per the illustration used in previous shlokas. Now, in this sequence of shlokas, we learn to develop the right attitude, the right vision towards the world.

Shri Krishna begins this topic by asserting that every other being in the universe has come into existence just like we have. The kshetrajnya, the higher aspect of Prakriti, has identified itself with the kshetra, the lower aspect of Prakriti. Each such erroneous identification creates the Purusha, also known as the jeeva, the individual soul. Subsequently, each Purusha has developed attachment to the qualities of Prakriti, accumulating selfish desires or karmas in the process. Billions of Purushas live out their lives in this world trying to exhaust their karmas, but in most cases, end up accumulating more karmas, and therefore, take birth again.

We have spoken of this erroneous identification several times, but have not delved into it deeply. The classic example to explain this erroneous identification is that of a burning hot iron ball. The iron ball has taken on heat, which is the property of fire. On the other hand, fire which is normally without shape, has taken on the property of the iron ball, which is round. Two things taking on each other's properties is known as "anyonya adhyaasa" or mutual superimposition. The Purusha's real nature is infinite, full of knowledge and bliss. Prakriti's nature is finite, inert and sorrowful. Erroneous identification results in them exchanging their properties, as it were. This is how the Purusha assumes

inertness of the body.

So our daily life is nothing but a Purusha interacting with several other Purushas, all of which are under the effect of this erroneous identification. There should be no hint of any arrogance that causes us to treat others differently just because we think that we have acquired more knowledge than them. In fact, whenever we emphasize differences between one another rather than similarities, even in worldly matters, we slip further away from liberation. But, developing an attitude of sameness towards everyone becomes difficult, especially when our minds are conditioned to differentiate rather than unify. Keeping this in mind, we learn to develop the correct attitude towards the world in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 27, Chapter 13

*samam sarveshu bhooteshu tishthantam parameshvaram |
vinashyatsvinashyantam yaha pashyati sa pashyati || 27 ||*

samam : equally
sarveshu : all
bhooteshu : beings
tishthantam : established
parameshvaram : supreme lord
vinashyatsu : perishable
avinashyantam : imperishable
yaha : who
pashyati : sees
saha : he
pashyati : sees

He who sees the supreme lord established equally in all beings, as the imperishable within the perishable, he sees (correctly).

When a nation is fighting for its independence from an invader, freedom fighters always urge the citizens to emphasize that which is common among them and de-emphasize that which is different. In India, freedom fighters had to urge its citizens to overcome their differences of region and religion, and emphasize the idea of a united Indian nation. Unless the citizens stopped identifying themselves with a certain region/religion and started identifying themselves as Indians, there was no chance of India gaining independence.

Similarly, all of us tend to focus on each others physical appearances, words, ideas, thoughts, all of which are fundamentally perishable and transient. Shri Krishna urges us to develop an attitude where we shift our focus from the perishable to the imperishable. In other words, we learn to see the imperishable Ishvara in everybody and everything, including ourselves. We saw earlier that everything and every being is a combination of the kshetra and the kshetrajnya. We now stop identifying with the imperishable kshetra and start identifying with the imperishable kshetrajnya, which is Ishvara himself.

So then, this is the correct attitude, the correct vision, that we should develop. We are a product of Ishvara and Prakriti, therefore we should identify with the Ishvara aspect as our self, our "I". In parallel, everything and everyone is also a product of Ishvara and Prakriti, therefore we should emphasize the Ishvara aspect which is present in everyone equally. We will come to the conclusion that the Ishvara aspect in us is the same as the Ishvara aspect in everyone else. Shri Krishna says that one who develops such a vision, one who sees the imperishable in the perishable, he truly sees, not anyone else.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 28, Chapter 13

*samam pashyanhi sarvatra samavasthitameeshvaram |
na hinastyaatmanaatamaanam tato yaati paraam gatim || 28 ||*

For, he who sees Ishvara established equally everywhere, does not kill his self by his own self. That is why he attains the supreme state.

samam : equal
pashyan : he who sees
hi : for
sarvatra : everywhere
samavasthitam : established equally
eeshvaram : Ishvara
na : not
hinasti : kill
aatmanaa : his self
aatmaanam : by his own self
tataha : that is why
yaati : attains
paraam : supreme
gatim : state

Shri Krishna explains the result of developing an equanimous vision in this shloka. He says that one who sees Ishvara residing equally in everything and everyone, including himself, does not harm or kill his self by his own self. He says that we commit a kind of suicide whenever we do not focus on the imperishable and give too much importance to the perishable. We would very rarely get the urge to commit suicide. So how does this happen?

Whenever our body's weight increases or decreases, we say "I am fat, I am thin". Whenever our body falls ill and recovers, we say "I am sick, I am healthy". Whenever our body is injured and healed, we say "I am injured, I am healed". We taken on changes that happen to a mass of flesh and bones as our own changes. By repeatedly taking on this identification to the body due to ignorance of our true nature, we get stuck in an endless cycle of desire, action, birth and death. This entry into the cycle of birth and death is referred to as "killing of one's self by one's own self".

Shri Krishna says that we need to develop samadarshanam, the vision of seeing the imperishable Ishvara in the perishable world. We need to stop identifying with the body, which is not ours to begin with. It belongs to the five elements that make up the universe, and will go back to them when it has run its course. We should identify with Ishvara who exists equally in us and in other beings. When we recognize that the Ishvara in us is the same Ishvara in everyone, we will attain the most supreme, the most pure state of Ishvara which is the state of brahman, the eternal essence. The instant we realize our identity with brahman, we attain liberation or moksha.

We have seen how to attach ourselves to Ishvara, how to identify ourselves with Ishvara in these shlokas. We also need to detach ourselves from Prakriti. We shall see how to do this in the next two shlokas.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 29, Chapter 13

*prakityaiva cha karmaani kriyamaanaani sarvashaha |
yaha pashyati tathaatamaanamakartaaram sa pashyati || 29 ||*

prakityaa : by Prakriti
eva : alone
cha : and
karmaani : actions
kriyamaanaani : performed
sarvashaha : all
yaha : one who
pashyati : sees
tathaa : and
aatmaanam : self
akartaaram : actionless
saha : he
pashyati : sees

One who sees all actions as performed by Prakriti alone, and the self as actionless, he sees (clearly).

Imagine that a toddler sees a phone for the first time. He is fascinated each time it rings, and

mistakenly thinks that by raising his hand, he makes the phone ring. But, if an adult has a never-ending fascination with a phone ringing, or has a mistaken notion about why it rings, we will think that there is something wrong with him. If an adult is overly fascinated by machines, it is because he lets the three gunaas of Prakriti still entice him, attract him. In general, once we know how a machine works, we are not overly fascinated or concerned with it.

Shri Krishna says that one who has truly assimilated the teaching of the Gita knows that actions, reactions, emotions, thought, logic, all these happen in the realm of Prakriti. Just like we lose fascination for machines once we know how they work, we should gradually stop being fascinated by Prakriti which is nothing but a machine that belongs to Ishvara. If this understanding seeps in, the shocks of world that we face daily will slowly lose their ability to shake us. We will perform our duties with our full attention and dedication so that we can exhaust our selfish desires, but leave the reactions and results to Ishvara because it is all happening in his Prakriti, his machine.

How do we go about doing this? The path to reduce our fascination with Prakriti is to increase our fascination with Ishvara. We do this by hearing stories of Ishvara, by attending satsanga, by associating with people who are devotees of Ishvara. The Gita itself contains chapters on the glory of Ishvara's vibhootis, which can be read as daily meditations. Eventually, we begin to see the entire universe as part of Ishvara's vishvaroopa, his universal form.

Now, even if we develop detachment towards the actions of Prakriti, our senses still get fascinated by variety, colour, form, diversity created by it. How do we deal with this aspect of Prakriti? Shri Krishna covers this next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 30, Chapter 13

*yadaa bhootaprithagbhaavamekasthamanupashyati |
tata eva cha vistaaram brahma sampadyate tadaa || 30 ||*

yadaa : when
bhootaprithagbhaavam : variety of
beings
ekastham : established in the one
anupashyati : realizes
tataha : from that
eva : only
cha : and
vistaaram : evolution
brahma : brahman
sampadyate : attains
tadaa : then

When he realizes that the variety of beings is established in the one, and it is only an evolution of that (one), he then attains brahman.

We came across the toddler who was fascinated by the phone ringing in the previous shloka's discussion. Imagine that the same toddler sees a traffic signal for the first time. The signal turns bright red, then green, then orange. Sometimes, the orange light flashes for a few seconds. Sometimes it shows a left arrow, sometimes a right arrow. While the toddler is bewildered by the diversity of colours and lights generated by the traffic signal, we as adults are no longer fascinated by it. We know that the basis of the diversity is 3 bulbs, and some electronic circuit that switches these bulbs on and off.

Similarly, one who knows the workings of Prakriti knows that the whole universe is nothing but a play of the three gunaas or qualities of Prakriti. Inert substances have tamasic predominance. Movement is caused by rajasic predominance. Intelligence is caused by saatvic predominance. These three gunaas are the building blocks of the variety we see in the universe, and it is these three gunaas that have been evolving, changing, combining with each other throughout the timeline of the universe. This Prakriti, the three gunaas, is nothing but a power of Ishvara himself.

So then, how do we reduce our fascination for the three gunaas? Our attitude should be as follows. The variety of the universe, everything that I see, is a product of the three gunaas of Prakriti. This Prakriti is a machine, a mechanism that has been set in motion by Ishvara. But I also know that Ishvara in his purest form is infinite and all-pervading, and that he resides in everyone as the "I", the self. Therefore, all of this variety and diversity is just an upaadhi, a conditioning of the self. When I see diversity, I am only seeing Ishvara, the self of all.

If we are able to develop this kind of attitude, this kind of knowledge, and stay rooted in it, we will shift our focus to Ishvara who is constant, and not the diversity of Prakriti that is ever changing. We will then attain unity with the eternal essence, with brahman, and achieve liberation.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 31, Chapter 13

*anaaditvaannirgunatvaatparamaatmaayamavyayaha |
shareerasthopi kaunteya na karoti na lipyate || 31 ||*

Without beginning, without qualities, this supreme self is indestructible. Though residing in the body, O Kaunteya, it neither acts nor is tainted.

anaaditvaat : without beginning
nirgunatvaat : without qualities
paramaatmaa : supreme self
ayam : this
avyayaha : indestructible
shareerasthaha : residing in the body
api : even though
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
na : not
karoti : act
na : not
lipyate : tainted

As this chapter slowly comes to a close, Shri Krishna begins to describe the nature of the supreme self. Since this chapter gives prominence to logic, more so than any other chapter in the Gita, he wants to clear any doubts or misconceptions that we may harbour about the supreme self. The first doubt we may have is as follows. If Prakriti is without beginning, and the supreme self is also without beginning, what makes them different?

Shri Krishna says that the difference is caused by whether or not they have gunaas or qualities. So far, we have seen that Prakriti is nothing but the three gunaas of sattva, rajas and tamas. But the supreme self is "nirguna", it has no association or association with any quality whatsoever. This is what makes it different than Prakriti. Also, Prakriti is constantly changing and perishing whereas the supreme self is imperishable. When something has association with qualities, like the human body has strength, it is bound to perish or decay. Since the supreme self has no qualities at all, it is imperishable. Prakriti, on the other hand, is every changing and perishable.

Another doubt is as follows. Does the supreme self get affected by the actions and reactions of Prakriti? Shri Krishna asserts that it does not. We have seen that the supreme self, due to ignorance, identifies itself with a body, a product of Prakriti. This is what is referred to in this shloka - it "resides" in the body. We have also repeatedly heard that the supreme self has nothing to do with Prakriti. It can never become the doer or the enjoyer of any actions. But due to the apparent identification with the body, the supreme self assumes that it is a doer and enjoyer. Since the identification is fake, not real, the supreme self can never get affected by the actions and reactions by Prakriti.

We may have understood the non-doership and non-enjoyership of the supreme self in theory, but it is still a little fuzzy. We need to clearly understand how the supreme self, in its real nature neither acts, nor

experiences the results of its actions. To better explain this, Shri Krishna provides an illustration in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 32, Chapter 13

*yathaa sarvagatam saukshmyaadaakaasham nopalipyate |
sarvatraavasthito dehe tathaatamaa nopalipyate || 32 ||*

Just as all-pervading space, being subtle, is not tainted, so is the self, situated everywhere in any body, not tainted.

yathaa : just as
sarvagatam : all pervading
saukshmyaat : being subtle
aakaasham : space
na : not
upalipyate : tainted
sarvatra : everywhere
avasthitaha : situated
dehe : body
tathaa : so
aatmaa : self
na : not
upalipyate : tainted

Many scriptures, including the Srimad Bhagavatam, describe the creation of the five great elements. Space was created first, followed by air, fire, water and then earth, each more tangible and visible than the one preceding it. Space, therefore, is the subtlest of elements. Its main property is indivisibility. We may put up walls and differentiate "my room" from "your room", but the wall does not actually divide space at all. The wall is an upaadhi, something that mentally limits space, but cannot ever limit space in reality.

Another property of space that it is unaffected by whatever it contains. You can throw dust, water, glue, perfume, odour, anything at all into space, yet it remains unaffected. The air in a room may get affected by perfume or odour, not space. But more fundamentally, space provides existence to everything. Without space, no object can ever exist.

Shri Krishna says that the self is similar to space in these aspects. Like space is as though divided into rooms, the self is one but appears as though residing differently in different bodies. Like space never gets tainted by whatever is thrown at it, the self never gets impacted by the results, reactions, experiences and consequences of any action. All actions and reactions stay in the realm of Prakriti. And when we say statements like "this pot is round", we should note that we cannot use the word "is" without realizing that the "is" is the "sat" or existence aspect of the self.

How should we bring this teaching into our life? Ultimately, all of us are craving for independence of one form or the other. For instance, the incessant drive to earn more wealth is towards gaining financial independence. Shri Krishna says that once we know that the self in us, the "I" in us is totally unaffected by any reaction or experience of the world, we will gain the highest and utmost level of independence, which is moksha or liberation. We just have to work at removing the ignorance of our true nature, which can only happen if we disassociate from Prakriti and associate with Ishvara.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 33, Chapter 13

*yathaa prakaashayatyekaha kritsnam lokamimam ravihi |
kshetram kshetree tathaa kritsnam prakaashayati bhaarata || 33 ||*

Just as the one sun illumines the entire world, so does the knower of the field illumine the entire field, O Bhaarata.

yathaa : just as
prakaashayati : illumines
ekaha : the one
kritsnam : entire
lokam : world
imam : this
ravihi : sun
kshetram : field
kshetree : knower of the field
tathaa : so does
kritsnam : entire
prakaashayati : illumines
bhaarata : O Bhaarata

The example of space in the previous shloka was meant to illustrate the unaffected and untainted nature of the self. In this shloka, the example of the sun is given to highlight the actionless nature of the self. The sun is located millions of miles away from the earth, yet it enables life on earth to exist. Minerals, plants, animals and humans, everything and every being survives only from the sun's energy. But the sun never acts. All of the actions happen on our planet distinct and separate from the sun.

Shri Krishna says that the self in us, the "I" in us is similar in nature to the sun. The self or the knower of the field, the kshetrajnya, illumines or knows the actions taking place in the kshetra, the field, our body, which is a part of Prakriti. Furthermore, the self does not take on the notion of pride or doership in the actions of the body, neither does it get differentiated due to the differences or modifications of Prakriti, just like the sun never claims doership nor gets differentiated due to the variety of form on our planet.

So, if the self is the sole knower of all of the actions in our body, how does our intellect know things? With respect to the analogy of the sun, the intellect can be compared to a pool of water that reflects the light of the sun. The intellect is just an instrument that functions due to the knowledge of the self. If the intellect is calm and steady, it works perfectly in interpreting the information sent to it from the mind and senses. If it is agitated or dull, it cannot work perfectly, just like the sun's reflection is disturbed when the pool of water is agitated or muddy.

Here, Shri Krishna asserts that the self is of the nature of "chit". It is knowledge, awareness, consciousness personified.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 34, Chapter 13

*kshetrakshetrajnayorevamanantaram jnyaanachakshushaa |
bhootaprakritimoksham cha ye viduryanti te param || 34 ||*

Those who, by the eye of wisdom, perceive the distinction between the field and its knower in this manner, and relinquishment from the cause of all beings, they attain the supreme.

kshetrakshetrajnayayoho : field and its knower
evam : in this manner
antaram : distinction
jnyaanachakshushaa : eye of wisdom
bhootaprakriti : cause of all beings
moksham : relinquishment
cha : and
ye : those who
viduhu : perceive
yanti : attain
te : they
param : supreme

After having understood the true nature of the self, the nature of the ignorance we are in, and also having understood the method of how to remove this ignorance, what is the result? Shri Krishna concludes this chapter by asserting that the one who has removed his ignorance through knowledge attain the supreme, which is moksha or liberation from the cycle of Prakriti's creation and dissolution. The key to understanding this chapter is "viveka", or discrimination, which was hinted at the beginning of this chapter by the words "idam shareera" or "this body".

Take the case of a forensic investigator who is hired to detect counterfeit currency notes. On the first day of his job, he will not be able to spot the difference between a fake note and a genuine note. After learning about the visual differences between what's fake and what's genuine, and after practising to spot those differences over a period of time, his eye will begin to see minute details that the average eye cannot see. This ability to separate the real from the unreal is discrimination, which is the "eye of wisdom" mentioned in the shloka.

So then, the one who knows how to conduct his life in a manner such that he can distinguish between the unreal aspects and the real aspects, between the field and its knower, between Purusha and Prakriti, and learn to see the imperishable in the perishable as Ishvara, such a person is freed of the mechanisms of Prakriti, the cause of all beings. This is the goal of jnyana yoga, which is summarized in the thirteenth chapter of the Gita. We will be able to attain this goal if we bring this teaching into our lives through constant reflection and meditation.

om tatsatiti shreematbhagavatgitasupanishadsu brahmavidyaayaam yogashaastre shreekrishnaarjunsamvade kshetrakshetrajnayavibhaagayogo naama trayodashodhyaayaha || 13 ||

Summary of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 13

Shri Krishna begins the chapter by describing what is meant by the field and the knower of the field, kshetra and kshetrajnya. He reminds us that this knowledge is not something new, that it has come directly from the Vedas and the Brahma Sutras. He then describes the field in detail by listing its modifications such as the great elements, the ego, the senses and so on. A list of attributes or qualities that are needed in order to escape the influence of the field is given. These qualities include humility, lack of arrogance and so on. These qualities are termed as "jnanaanam" or means of knowledge.

The topic of the supreme self, brahman, the knower of the field or kshetrajnya, is taken up next. The "sat" or existence aspect of brahman is indicated first with attributes such as hands, legs and so on. It is then indicated with negation of those same attributes, following the "adhyaropa apavaada" technique used in Vedanta. Brahman, which can never become an object of our knowledge, is explained through a series of paradoxes - it is near, yet it is far and so on. The "chit" or awareness aspect of brahman is also highlighted using the phrase "it is the light of all lights".

The field and its knower are now explained from the point of view of the individualized self, jeeva by using the terminology of Purusha and Prakriti. Shri Krishna first defines these terms, points out their beginningless nature, and also points out how they become the cause of enjoyership and doership respectively. The fall of the immaculate supreme self is explained by the apparent relationship of Purusha and Prakriti due to ignorance of our true nature as the supreme self that resides as Ishvara in all bodies. Release from this ignorance leads to liberation.

In order to get to a stage where we can discriminate or distinguish between the field and its knower, we have to go through a curriculum of saadhanas or spiritual practice. Shri Krishna provides this roadmap of steps as karma, bhakti, raja and sankhya yoga. The key thing, however, is to orient or attach ourselves to the imperishable Ishvara, and to detach ourselves from identification with Prakriti, which is the storehouse of all action and diversity.

Shri Krishna concludes the chapter with two illustrations highlighting the existence and awareness, the sat and chit aspects of the supreme self. The analogy of space is used to illustrate the all-pervading, unattached, untainted and singular nature of the supreme self. The analogy of the

sun is used to illustrate the knowledge, awareness and non-acting nature of the supreme self. The chapter ends by asserting that the fruit of knowing the true nature of the supreme self is moksha or liberation.

Gunatraya Vibhaaga Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 14**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**param bhooyaha pravakshyaami jnyaanaam jnyaanamuttamam |
yajnyaatvaa munayaha sarve paraam siddhimito gataahaa || 1 ||*

param : highest
 bhooyaha : again
 pravakshyaami : speak
 jnyaanaam : knowledge
 jnyaanamuttamam : superior to any knowledge
 yajnyaatvaa : having known
 munayaha : sages
 sarve : all
 paraam : highest
 siddhim : accomplishment
 itaha : here
 gataahaa : attained

Shree Bhagavaan said: I shall again speak of that highest knowledge which is superior to any other knowledge. Having known this, all the sages, (liberated) from here, have attained the highest accomplishment.

Shri Krishna described the fundamental ignorance of our true nature in the previous chapter. The supreme self, which is our true nature, mistakenly identifies itself with one body within Prakriti or Maaya and becomes the Purusha. It further gets trapped in Prakriti when it gets enchanted by play of the three gunaas of Prakriti. Shri Krishna uses this chapter to explain the nature of these three gunaas, their characteristics, their effects and their remedy in detail.

This shloka is in the form of "anubandha chatushtaya", the four-fold curriculum covered in a text. It systematically lists the subject matter of the chapter, the student who is qualified to study this chapter, the goal of this chapter and the relationship of the subject to the goal. The subject matter is brahmavidyaa or the knowledge of brahman. One who is a muni, one who has a contemplative mind, is fit to study this chapter. The highest accomplishment one can aspire to - liberation from sorrow - is the goal of this chapter. When we know brahman as our own self, the goal is attained. This is the prayojanam, the relationship of the subject matter to the goal of this chapter.

Before the topic is begun, however, we notice that Shri Krishna repeats the statement that he has made in earlier chapters about the glory of this knowledge. He does so because knowledge for us usually means academic, professional or any other type of worldly knowledge. It is always knowledge about some person, object, substance, concept, technique, something that can be accessed with the senses and mind. However, the knowledge of the self is that knowledge that reveals what the subject is, what the "I" is. In order to remove this hard conditioning, this deep programming within us, Shri Krishna has to repeat the importance of this knowledge.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 14

*idam jnyaanamupaashritya mama saadharmyamagataahaa |
sargepi nopajaayante pralaye na vyathanti cha || 2 ||*

Those who have taken refuge in this knowledge, and have attained identity with me, are not born even during creation, and not afflicted during dissolution.

idam : this
jnyaanam : knowledge
upaashritya : taken refuge
mama : my
saadharmyam : identity
agataahaa : attained
sarge : creation
api : even
na : not
upajaayante : born
pralaye : dissolution
na : not
vyathanti : afflicted
cha : and

Actors who work in the daily soap opera world lead interested lives. If an actor is selected to play a part in a well-established and long running soap, they are overjoyed since their career has just skyrocketed. But once the actor is selected, they are afraid when they read each day's script, since their role can be killed off at any time by the director. The director and actor have two different visions. The director is concerned with moving the story forward, whereas the actor is concerned with preserving his role.

Now, if we identify with the various roles or the various parts that we play each day, we will face a fate similar to that of the actor. We experience birth and death every day, every minute, throughout our lives. When we get a new job, for instance, a new "senior manager of marketing" is born. When we lose that job, that senior manager "dies". If a marriage happens in the family, several new "in-laws" are born. If something goes wrong in that marriage, all those in-laws "die". If something makes us angry, an angry man is born, and will die in a short while once the anger dissipates. Birth and death are part and parcel of Prakriti's functioning.

Shri Krishna urges us to identify with Ishvara so that we are not disturbed or agitated when any kind of birth or death, even that of our own body, occurs. If the actor has the same vision as the director, he will take the end of his role in good stead and go on to do a wonderful job in his next assignment. If we have removed our ignorance through knowledge, if we have realized our true nature as identical to that of Ishvara, we will see things from Ishvara's perspective and stop identifying with the ups and downs experienced by our body.

How exactly does this creation, this birth take place? Shri Krishna explains next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 14

*mama yonirmahadbrahma tasmingarbhham dadhaamyaham |
sambhavaha sarvabhootaanaam tato bhavati bhaaraata || 3 ||*

**My womb is the great brahman. In it, I place the seed. From that, O
Bharaata, is the birth of all beings.**

mama : my
yonih : womb
mahadbrahma : great brahman
tasmin : in it
garbham : seed
dadhaami : place
aham : I
sambhavaha : birth
sarvabhootaanaam : all beings
tataha : from that
bhavati : happens
bhaaraata : O Bhaaraata

According to the theory of karma, each jeeva or individual soul generates new unfulfilled desires or vaasanaas. These vaasanaas are created as a result of karma phala or fruits of action. Each action of eating a sweet creates a new desire to eat a sweet later, for instance. One lifetime is not enough to exhaust these vaasanaas, causing the jeeva to continuously take birth in the world to fulfill its desires. This is the explanation of birth and rebirth of jeevas. But how does the universe itself begin? Shri Krishna describes this topic in extremely poetic language in two shlokas.

Ishvara, at the beginning of creation, splits himself into his two aspects. One aspect is Prakriti, referred to here as the "great brahman", which comprises three gunaas or qualities. Prakriti has the power to generate an infinite variety of forms through innumerable permutations and combinations of its three gunaas. But it is inert. It cannot create the universe by itself. The awareness aspect of Ishvara, the kshetrajnya, is needed to infuse Prakriti with life. This happens when Ishvara places all of the jeevas into Prakriti, just like seeds are placed into soil.

Let's examine this in more detail. How exactly does the jeeva come into contact with Prakriti? It is due to avidyaa or ignorance. Each jeeva's vaasanaas or unfulfilled desires are caused by its ignorance of its true nature which is infinite. Instead, the jeeva, also known as the Purusha, thinks that it is incomplete, and mistakenly rushes out into Prakriti to make itself complete again. This illusory link between the Purusha and Prakriti becomes the source of its birth and rebirth in the cycle of samsaara.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 14

*sarvayonishu kaunteya moortayaha sambhavantiyaahaa |
taasaam brahma mahadyoniraham beejapradaha pitaa || 4 ||*

sarvayonishu : all wombs
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
moortayaha : forms
sambhavanti : born
yaahaa : many
taasaam : of those
brahma : brahman
mahat : great
yonih : womb
aham : I am
beejapradaha : seed giving
pitaa : father

Of the many forms that are born from all wombs, O Kaunteya, the great brahman is their womb, I their seed-giving father.

We may be wondering, how does Ishvara split himself into his two aspects of awareness and matter or Prakriti? Doesn't it sound far fetched? Something quite similar happens to us every night. When we dream, our minds splits, as it were, into two. One aspect becomes the watcher, and the other aspect projects our dreams. In other words, the mind watches its own show. The Mandukya upanishad provides a detailed comparison of our waking, dreaming and deep sleep states.

Shri Krishna says that Ishvara, having divided himself into his two aspects, is both the mother and father of every thing and every living being in the universe. After he deposits the seeds or the jeevas into Prakriti, he creates the state of Hiranyagarbha. This state contains the potential to generate an entire sequence of creation, sustenance and dissolution of several universes. It is comparable to a DVD that contains within it the potential to create an entire two hour movie with several characters and locations.

Also, the ultimate womb, the ultimate source of the birth of all beings is the great brahman or Prakriti, which is nothing but the three gunaas. If we have to remove the impact and influence that the three gunaas exert upon us, we need to study what they are, how they impact us, how we fall under their sway, and how does one remain unaffected by them. Shri Krishna, having summarized the relevance of the three gunaas, proceeds to analyze the three gunaas in significant detail from the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 14

*sattvam rajastama iti gunaahaa prakritisambhavaahaa |
nibandhanti mahaabaaho dehe dehinamavyayam || 5 ||*

Sattva, rajas, tamas, these gunaas born of Prakriti, O mighty-armed warrior, bind the imperishable body dweller to the body.

sattvam : sattva
rajaha : rajas
tamaha : tamas
iti : these
gunaahaa : gunaas
prakritisambhavaahaa : born of Prakriti
nibandhanti : bind
mahaabaaho : O mighty-armed warrior
dehe : to the body
dehinam : body dweller
avyayam : imperishable

Shri Krishna beings the detailed analysis of Prakriti with two points. First, he breaks down Prakriti into its three components: the gunaas which are sattva, rajas and tamas. We have to note that the phrase "born of" in the shloka does not mean that Prakriti creates the three gunaas. It means that Prakriti itself is nothing but the three gunaas. Next, Shri Krishna states the effect of Prakriti on the Purusha, also known as the jeeva, the individual soul. He says that Prakriti binds or ties down the imperishable body dweller, the "dehi", the jeeva, to the body.

Let us begin by understanding what the term "gunaa" means. From our point of view, gunaa is a state of mind. In just one day, we experience calmness, passion and lethargy, which are roughly equal to sattva, rajas and tamas respectively. From a broader point of view, gunaas refer to building blocks of the universe. Inert matter is tamas, action or dynamism is rajas, and harmony is sattva. Since we are primarily interested in liberation from our sorrow, we shall focus on the impact of the gunaas on our mind rather than their impact on the universe.

Now, if we have repeatedly heard that our self is imperishable and can never be bound, then how can the perishable gunaas bind the self? The answer is : the gunaas by themselves do not bind us. Ignorance of our true nature, followed by our mis-identification with the body, puts us in a situation where we ourselves allow the gunaas to take over control of our life.

Imagine that you have parked your car on the left side of road. A car that looks just like your car is also parked on the same road, but on the right side of the road. After you come out of the building and absent-mindedly think that the other car is yours, you are trapped. You see a new scratch on the car and get upset, you get a parking ticket and have to pay the fine, and so on. The other car has not "bound" you, but your incorrect knowledge has done so. We can also go back to the example

of the child watching the boxing match. He is as though glued to the screen, while his grandmother is not. The TV does not bind him since it is nothing but millions of red, blue and green dots of light. It is the child's strong identification with the boxer that binds him.

Similarly, the individual soul which has mis-identified itself with the body, gets entrapped in the play of the three gunaas. In the next three shlokas, Shri Krishna takes up each gunaa one by one, and explains its power to bind the body in detail.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 6, Chapter 14

*tatra sattvam nirmalatvaatprakaashamanaamayam |
sukhasangena badhnaati jnyaanasangena chaanagha || 6 ||*

tatra : of these
sattvam : sattva
nirmalatvaat : pure
prakaasham : bright
anaamayam : healthy
sukhasangena : attachment to joy
badhnaati : binds
jnyaanasangena : attachment to knowl-
edge
cha : and
anagha : O sinless one

Of these, sattva is pure, bright and healthy. It binds through attachment to joy and attachment to knowledge, O sinless one.

In simple terms, our mind is in a state of sattva whenever we experience joy, peace and calmness. We are alert, our mind is able to think very logically, we are able to grasp the most complex statements that we read or hear, and we don't feel the need to rush out into the world.

Shri Krishna says that sattva refers to purity, brightness and health. Our mind can be compared to the water in a glass cup. When the pond is free from agitation, and all the dirt has settled down, it is crystal clear and is able to reflect light beautifully. Similarly, when our mind is in a state of sattva, there is absence of dirt in the form of selfish desires. There is brightness because it is able to reflect the light of the self, the awareness of the self, without any hinderance. There is health because it enables us to get as close to our natural state of joy as is possible in the human body.

Now, no matter how enjoyable or pleasant this state is, Shri Krishna reminds us that sattva has the ability to bind us, to trap us, because anyone will like to remain in a state of joy and calmness. Furthermore, if we foresee that this state will go away, we would like to hold on to this state of joy tightly and not let it go. Sattva can also bind us through attachment to knowledge. Since sattva enables our mind to accumulate more and more worldly knowledge, read more books, attain more academic qualifications, and ultimately pump up our ego, we get attached to it even more.

Why is sattva able to bind us to joy and knowledge? We mistake the joy provided by sattva because we have not experienced what real joy is. That can only happen in meditation when we are able to access the joy that is inherent in the "I", in the self. All other joys are in the realm of Prakriti - temporary, perishable, and illusory. True joy is in the subject, the "I", not in the object. Sattva, though preferable to rajas and tamas, is to be used for getting us closer to the goal of liberation, and has to be ultimately discarded, just like the fire is turned off after we cook our meal.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 14

*rajo raagaatmakam viddhi trishnaasangasamudhbhavam |
tannibandhaati kaunteya karmasangena dehinam || 7 ||*

Know rajas to be of the nature of passion, the source of thirst and attachment. It binds the body dweller by attachment to action, O Kaunteya.

rajaha : rajas
raagaatmakam : nature of passion
viddhi : know
trishnaa : thirst
sanga : attachment
samudhbhavam : source
tat : it
nibandhaati : binds
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
karmasangena : attachment to action
dehinam : body dweller

Rajas is our state of mind when it is agitated, like a glass of water that is being stirred. Imagine that we have to attend an extremely important meeting at 5 PM. It is 4:50 PM and the taxi is stuck in a traffic jam. Our mind will be in a state of rajas. A series of thoughts will suggest that we wait in the car, while another series of thoughts will suggest that we leave the taxi and start walking. Whenever our mind is agitated by a thoughts that propel us to act, we are in a state of rajas.

Shri Krishna says that rajas creates trishnaa or thirst for what we do not possess, and sanga or attachment towards what we already possess. Furthermore, rajas creates a vicious cycle. It fuels our desires, creates thoughts that compel us to act so that we can acquire objects, then it creates attachment to those objects which further increases rajas. Typically, rajas dominates our mind from sunrise until sunset.

To understand how rajas can bind, consider the case of a multi-millionaire who has recently married his young girlfriend. The millionaire is self sufficient and does not need to work to support himself. But his wife's brothers, relatives, friends and acquaintances slowly approach him for capital to start their business, connections to get them jobs, advice on their career and so on. Soon, the millionaire ends up working all day, every day. Even though the millionaire does not need to move a finger, he gets bound by his relationship to his wife.

Similarly, even though the self, the "I" does not act, rajas binds the self through attachment to action and its results. It makes us say "I am the doer" and "I am the enjoyer" whereas it is actually Prakriti that is acting and providing the results. Karma yoga helps us come out of this bondage and entrapment. It teaches us to continue to act in this world, but do it in a way that removes our identification with Prakriti. We slowly start submitting the results of our actions to Ishvara, then we slowly start letting Ishvara take over the doership of our actions as well.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 14

*tamastvajnyaanam viddhi mohanam sarvadehinaam |
pramaadaalasyanidraabhistan nibadhmaati bhaarata || 8 ||*

And, know tamas to be born of ignorance, deluding all the body dwellers. It binds them through heedlessness, laziness and sloth, O Bhaarata.

tamaha : tamas
tu : and
ajnyaanam : born of ignorance
viddhi : know
mohanam : delude
sarvadehinaam : all body dwellers
pramaada : heedlessness
aalasya : laziness
nidraabhihi : through sloth
tat : it
nibadhmaati : binds
bhaarata : O Bhaarata

Tamas is our state of mind when it is dull and inert. Like a glass of dirty water cannot let light shine through, tamas prevents our mind from thinking clearly. Our mind starts to operate in moha, which means confusion or error, mistaking one thing for another. Tamas can be triggered by an overpowering emotional situation like Arjuna seeing his family members and loved ones on the opposite side of the battlefield. A tamasic state can also be triggered by abusing our sense organs through excessive drinking, smoking, watching TV and so on.

After a long and tiring day, when we want to rush to get a good night's sleep, we get a call from a friend who wants to catch up. Try as we might, we will not be able to understand what he is saying because the mind has switched to a tamasic state due to exhaustion. Our memory does not work properly and our intellect's logic is flawed. All we want to do is to rest our head on the pillow. When tamas reaches the height of its potency, we fall asleep.

Shri Krishna says that tamas is born out of ignorance. At its core, tamas keeps the Purusha, the jeeva, body dweller under the delusion that he is the body and not the self. When we forget our true nature as the self, the eternal essence, we assume that our body is who we are. This erroneous notion, this ignorance enables tamas to bind us, to trap us.

Tamas binds us in three ways, through heedlessness, laziness and sloth. Heedlessness is the performance of actions without intellectual focus or awareness. We either perform actions carelessly, such as dialing the wrong phone number, or perform actions that are futile, such as gambling or excessive alcohol consumption. Laziness is postponing or abstaining from our duties. Sloth is lying around in a state of stupor or sleep. Now, there is a place for resting and sleeping in our life, which is at the end of every day. But some of us derive joy from futile actions, from procrastination, from lazing around and so on. It is this

joy through which tamas binds us.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 9, Chapter 14

*sattvam sukham sanjayati rajaha karmani bhaarata |
jnyaanamaavritya tu tamaha pramaade sanjayatyuta || 9 ||*

**Sattva binds through joy, rajas through action, O Bhaarata, while
tamas cloaks knowledge and binds through heedlessness.**

sattvam : sattva
sukham : joy
sanjayati : binds
rajaha : rajas
karmani : action
bhaarata : O Bhaarata
jnyaanam : knowledge
aavritya : cloaks
tu : while
tamaha : tamas
pramaade : heedlessness
sanjayati : binds
uta : and

Shri Krishna recaps the characteristics of the three gunaas in this shloka. Sattva binds by making us hold on to joy experienced after attaining a sense object. Rajas binds us by giving us joy in performing actions and obtaining their results. Tamas binds us by giving us joy in holding on to laziness and heedlessness. We now begin to look into how these three are interrelated.

In the second chapter, we have come across a series of shlokas that describe how the mind can fall from sattva into rajas and tamas in a matter of seconds. We start with the mind resting in a peaceful sattvic state. A tinge of rajas comes in, causing us to think about some sense object, let's say a sweet. This fuels rajas further, creating a strong attachment to that sweet, culminating in a strong desire to do anything to get that sweet. But it gets worse. If we cannot get that sweet, if someone or something obstructs our consumption of the sweet, anger arises in us. Rajas deteriorates into tamas. The last rung of the ladder of fall is when anger goes to such an extent that it causes us to lose our faculty of intelligence and memory.

Conversely, we can go from tamas to rajas to sattva, but it may take a little longer. For someone steeped in tamas, immersing themselves in action will raise them to the level of rajas. When action becomes focused and directed towards the pursuit of a selfless goal, rajas is elevated to the level of sattva. Swami Vivekananda always used to say "awake, arise, stop not till the goal is reached". When India was under British rule, many had become accustomed to this slavery and had fallen into a tamasic state. They could not find a way out of their predicament, and were clouded in ignorance. Swami Vivekananda's message urged citizens to engage in action towards independence. That was the only way to get them out of the tamasic state of laziness.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 14

*rajastamaschaabhibhooya sattvam bhavati bhaarata |
rajaha sattvam tamaschaiva tamaha sattvam rajastathaa || 10 ||*

Sattva rises, O Bhaarata, when it overpowers rajas and tamas, so does rajas overpower sattva and tamas, and also tamas overpowers sattva and rajas.

rajas : rajas
tamas : tamas
cha : and
abhibhooya : overpowers
sattvam : sattva
bhavati : rises
bhaarata : O Bhaarata
rajaha : rajas
sattvam : sattva
tamas : tamas
cha : and
eva : similarly
tamaha : tamas
sattvam : sattva
rajas : rajas
tathaa : similarly

Now that we have a basic understanding of the properties of the three gunaas, we need to go one level deeper. We know that our mind is always under the influence of the three gunaas, since it is made up of those very three gunaas. How do these three gunaas impact the mind? Do they work in parallel or do they work in sequence? Is there any one gunaa that is more powerful than the other?

Shri Krishna says that our mind can only be under the impact of one gunaa at a time. This happens when one gunaa assumes dominance, and consequently, asserts its authority over the others. When sattva is dominant, it dominates over rajas and tamas. Similarly, rajas dominates over the other two and tamas over the other two. All three gunaas are at war with each other in our mind. When one gunaa achieves victory, it temporarily defeats the others.

Having known this, we now would like to know which gunaa within us dominates more than others. This is not an easy question to answer, because we have to analyze ourselves and not anyone else. We need to look within. We need to understand what thoughts, feelings and emotions should we watch out for so that we can tie them back to a specific gunaa. If we conduct this analysis for a while, we will know which gunaa predominates. Shri Krishna expands on the topic of the marks or signs of each gunaa in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 14

*sarvasvareshu dehesminprakaasha upajaayate |
jnyaanam yadaa tadaa vidyaadvivridham sattvamityuta || 11 ||*

**When luminous knowledge radiates through all gates of this body,
then one should know that sattva has increased greatly.**

What are the marks of sattva? Shri Krishna says that when we see radiance, or when we see knowledge radiating from a person, we should know that we are in the presence of a highly sattvic person. The word "dvaara" usually means door or gate, but here it refers to the sense organs, our doors to the world. Even though the sense organs are meant from receiving stimuli from the world, they can also convey our internal state to the world. Our eyes, especially, can give away our thoughts. If our mind is wandering, our eyes will also wander, for instance. In a sattvic person, radiance shines through the sense organs, especially the eyes.

Now, we should not think that a highly sattvic person will radiate beams of light from their body. But they do radiate calmness and peace. We can sense peace if we are near them, or pick up on their calmness if we are watching them on a screen. Watch Dr. Jane Goodall speak about her efforts to save gorillas in Africa, and you will be drawn to the serenity on her face instantly. Such people harbour few, if any, selfish desires in their mind. This lack of dirt in the form of selfishness lets their inner radiance, the light of their eternal essence, shine through.

From our perspective, whenever we notice an increase in clear thinking, we should know that sattva is predominant in our mind. If we see fried food but the intellect prevents our hand from reaching to pick up that food, we are in a sattvic state. If our thoughts are towards the well-being of the family, our city or our nation, instead of just our narrow well-being, we are in a sattvic state. If our mind is sharp and alert, if we don't let anything drop in our personal and professional lives, we are in a sattvic state.

sarvasvareshu : in all gates
dehe : body
asmin : this
prakaashaha : luminous
upajaayate : radiates
jnyaanam : knowledge
yadaa : when
tadaa : then
vidyaat : one should know
vivridham : increased
sattvam : sattva
iti : this
uta : definitely

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 14

*lobhaha pravrittiraarambhaha karmanaamashamaha spruhaa |
rajasyetaani jaayante vividdhe bharatarshabha || 12 ||*

Greed, activity, commencement of actions, unrest, desire. These arise when rajas is predominant, o foremost among the Bharataas.

lobhaha : greed
pravrittihi : activity
araarambhaha : commencement
karmanaam : actions
ashamaha : unrest
spruhaa : desire
rajasi : of rajas
etaani : these
jaayante : arise
vividdhe : predominance
bharatarshabha : O foremost among the
Bharataas

Shri Krishna addressed Arjuna as "bharatarshabha", the foremost scion of the Bharata dynasty, and enumerates the marks of a person who is under the influence of raajas. He says that whenever our mind generates thoughts of greed, selfish activity, commencement of action, unrest or uneasiness, and desire for even trivial things, we should realize that we are under the sway of rajas. In fact, we consider this to be our natural state of mind, especially during the waking hours of the day.

If we look at the first half of the shloka in reverse order, we start with spruha, which is a selfish desire for objects that have nothing to do with our duties, like a gold watch. Frequent thoughts for acquiring the gold watch lead to ashama or restlessness, where we are not satisfied with our present situation and want to do something else. We then begin to act, karmanaam aarambha, so that we can acquire this gold watch. Our plans may lead us to do another part time job or withdraw from our savings, which is pravritti, engaging in selfish action. Even after we acquire the gold watch, we are not satisfied and want another one. That is lobha, greed, the height of rajasic influence on our mind.

It is not easy to detect whether our actions are prompted by selfishness or not. Only a pure mind that has been cleansed of selfishness through karma yoga, with the aid of a guru, can recognize the subtle difference between sattvic and rajasic actions. Karma yoga teaches us to analyze our qualification and proclivity for selecting an appropriate vocation. If we are trained to become an actor, and are also passionately interested in acting, then that becomes our vocation. There is a baseline level of rajas needed to perform actions towards fulfilling the duties of our vocation, which is perfectly fine. Shri Krishna says that we need to watch for signs where rajas increases beyond that baseline level, where selfishness creeps into our actions.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 14

*aprakaashopravrittishcha pramaado moha eva cha |
tamasyetaani jaayante viviriddhe kurunandan || 13 ||*

aprakaashaha : darkness
apravrittihi : inaction
cha : and
pramaadaha : heedlessness
mohaha : error
eva : also
cha : and
tamasi : of tamas
etaani : these
jaayante : arise
viviriddhe : predominant
kurunandan : O descendent of the
Kurus

Darkness, inaction, heedlessness and also error. These arise when tamas is predominant, O descendant of the Kurus.

Shri Krishna addressed Arjuna as "kurunandana" when explaining the marks of tamas, but addressed him as "bharatarshabha" when explaining the marks of rajas. He was probably hinting that some members of the Kuru dynasty, the Kauravas, were under the influence of tamas. When we are under the influence of tamas, we make erroneous decisions. We become inert like a stone, resorting to inaction. Even when we act, it is out of heedlessness. Our knowledge is covered by tamas, creating darkness within us.

Let us go deeper into what inaction really means. When we have a lack of drive to achieve anything in the world, when we want to escape all sense of responsibilities, when all ambitions go away, that is inaction. Moha, error or delusion is even worse. We cannot accurately judge our relationship with the world, with other people, with our family, our friends, our job and so on. We become a "good for nothing", and will remain in that state unless someone wakes us up.

Nature has its own scale of tamas, rajas and sattva. It is better to crawl like an insect than lie around like a stone, better to work like an ant rather than crawl like an ant, better to pollinate flowers like a bird than simply work like an ant, better to give milk to others like a cow than pollinate flowers like a bird, and it is better to work with one's intellect like a human than to give milk to others like a cow. So one who is steeped in tamas, should start to act, even if the actions are without any planning or thinking, just to get into a higher mental state.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 14

*yada sattve pravṛiddhe tu pralayam yaati dehabhrita |
tadottamavidāan lokaanamalāanpratipadyate || 14 ||*

**When sattva is predominant, and the body dweller reaches his end,
then he attains the immaculate worlds of the knowers of the highest.**

yada : when
sattve : sattva
pravṛiddhe : predominant
tu : and
pralayam : end
yaati : reaches
dehabhrita : body dweller
tadaa : then
uttamavidāan : knowers of the highest
lokaan : worlds
amalāan : immaculate
pratipadyate : attains

Now, Shri Krishna explains the effects of each gunaa from the perspective of reincarnation. He says that one whose mind is in a sattvic state during the time of death travels to realms that are subtler than the human world. These realms are termed as "Brahmaloka", the abode of Lord Brahma. It is said that there is no room for any desire, sorrow or disease in such realms, given the complete absence of rajas or tamas. Such people, however, are still subject to the bondages caused by sattva, as discussed previously.

Let us revisit the example of the young child who has developed a strong identification with a television character played by the actor "ABC". ABC's run as an action hero in a popular TV show has ended. He has decided to play the role of a serious professor in his new TV series. The young child now has a choice. He can either continue to identify with ABC in his new role as a professor, or find another TV show with an action hero to identify with. The choice depends on the young child's mental state. If it is heavily rajasic, he will find another action hero. If it has some sattva, he will follow ABC as a professor.

Similarly, our desires and thoughts, which are driven by the gunaas that influence us, will determine our fate after this physical body drops. The subtle body, which is nothing but our desires and thoughts, will attract another physical body that enables it to carry out those desires. It is almost similar to DNA shaping a body based on the programming it contains. Therefore, if our subtle body harbours sattvic thoughts, it will gain entry into a highly sattvic body after death. But if it continues to harbour rajasic or tamasic thoughts, it will obtain a different destination. This is explained in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 14

*rajasi pralayam gatvaa karmasangishu jaayate |
tathaa praleenastamasi moodhayonishu jaayate || 15 ||*

One who has reached his end in rajas is born among those attached to action, and one who is dying in tamas is born in the wombs of the ignorant.

rajasi : rajas
pralayam : end
gatvaa : one who has reached
karmasangishu : those who are attached
to action
jaayate : born
tathaa : and
praleenaha : one who is dying
tamasi : tamas
moodhayonishu : ignorant wombs
jaayate : born

Previously, Shri Krishna explained the fate of one whose mental state is sattvic at the end of his life. Here, he says that one whose mental state is rajasic while dying is reborn in a family of action oriented individuals. Also, one whose mental state is tamasic while dying is reborn in the wombs of the ignorant and the inert. This includes plants, trees, creepers, birds, insects and other animals.

It is not just the mental state that determines one's fate in the next life. Every action we perform leaves impressions in our mind, which also impacts our fate. One who has performed selfless actions throughout their life is born in a virtuous family. One who has performed selfish actions is born with a tendency to get attached to material objects. And one who has performed harmful actions is born with devilish tendencies. Such a person will not stop at anything to get their way, including physically harming others. In their current life and in their next life, it is totally up to each individual to cultivate their discrimination through selfless service, devotion and company of devotees so that they can counteract the effect of excessive rajas.

The Srimad Bhagavatam tells the story of the illustrious king Bharata who was one of the most sattvic individuals of his time. Through extreme attachment to his pet deer, he became steeped in tamas, and was born as a deer in his next life. But due to the selfless actions performed in his life as a king, he developed a degree of renunciation not even found in humans. He was finally born as a highly sattvic human who ultimately achieved liberation. Shri Krishna repeatedly urges us to employ rajas to perform selfless service, and cultivate sattva through reducing selfish activities.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 14

*karmanaha sukritasyaahuhu saattvikam nirmalam phalam |
 rajasastu phalam duhkhamajnyaanam tamasaha phalam || 16 ||*

The result of good action is sattvik and pure, it is said, while the result of rajas is sorrow, and the result of tamas is ignorance.

karmanaha : action
 sukritasya : good
 aahuhu : is said
 saattvikam : sattvik
 nirmalam : pure
 phalam : result
 rajasaha : rajas
 tu : while
 phalam : result
 duhkham : sorrow
 ajnyaanam : ignorance
 tamasaha : tamas
 phalam : result

When new year comes around, many people make new year resolutions to lose weight. Many take a gym membership, but most end up using it only for a few days. The ones that consciously develop a habit of going to the gym everyday are the most likely to lose weight. Even if they go to the gym for ten minutes every day, they will lose weight. This is because habits are self reinforcing. A behaviour creates a habit, which pushes us to repeat the behaviour, which strengthens the habit, and so on.

Similarly, we can shape our mental states by choosing our actions consciously. Shri Krishna says that sattvic or selfless actions generate a sattvic state, rajasic or selfish actions generate a rajasic state, and tamasic or ignorant actions generate a tamasic state. If we are predominantly rajasic by nature, we can improve our state by emphasizing the performance of sattvic actions. If we are predominantly tamasic by nature, we can change it by emphasizing the performance of rajasic actions.

The law of karma holds true in every situation, including this one. If we perform rajasic actions, we will attain temporary joy, which will eventually generate sorrow. It does not take a large amount of raaga dvesha, likes or dislikes, to make us act selfishly. And if we perform tamasic actions, we will continue to live our lives in inertness and ignorance. Only through sattvic actions will we create a state of purity and serenity in our mind.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 14

*sattvaatsanjaayate jnyaanam rajaso lobha eva cha |
pramaadamohau tamaso bhavatojnyaanameva cha || 17 ||*

From sattva arises wisdom, and rajas from greed. Heedlessness, error as well as ignorance arise from tamas.

sattvaa : from sattva
sanjaayate : arises
jnyaanam : knowledge
rajasaha : rajas
lobha : greed
eva : also
cha : and
pramaadamohau : heedlessness and error
tamasaha : tamas
bhavataha : arises
ajnyaanam : ignorance
eva : also
cha : and

Previously, we took the example of people who make it a habit to go to the gym everyday, and eventually make it into an integral part of their lives. If we fast forward that example a few months further, we find that these people have lost weight, they are taking care of their body, they are eating healthy, avoiding smoking and so on. Their persistence in getting over the initial pain of going to the gym has paid off. They enjoy the state being healthy and being fit. Intelligent action has shaped their physical state, and consequently, the physical state gives its result.

Similarly, mental states that were shaped by intelligent actions give results as well. Shri Krishna says that sattvic mental state gives us access to material and spiritual knowledge, since our intellect improves its ability to think clearly and grasp information quickly. A rajasic mental state makes us act in the world to rush after objects. We want objects we do not have, and want more of objects that we already have. A tamasic mental state has the worst possible outcome. It keeps us steeped in ignorance of the material world, and of our true nature. We do not want to act at all, and even if we do, we perform futile actions, or perform careless actions.

This shloka and the prior shloka point out the self reinforcing nature of actions and gunaas. If we consciously perform sattvic actions day after day, we will generate a greater proportion of sattva in our mind, which will further spur sattvic actions. This is the logic behind karma yoga. By urging us to perform selfless actions, Shri Krishna wants us to rise from our rajasic and tamasic existence to one of greater sattva.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 14

*oordhvam gacchanti sattvasthaa madhye tishtanti raajasaahaa |
jaghanyagunavrittisthaa adho gacchanti taamasaahaa || 18 ||*

Those established in sattva go upwards, those in rajas stay in the middle. Those under the influence of the lowest guna, established in tamas, go downwards.

oordhvam : upwards
gacchanti : go
sattvasthaa : established in sattva
madhye : middle
tishtanti : stay
raajasaahaa : established in rajas
jaghanya : lowest
gunavrittisthaahaa : influence of guna
adhaha : downwards
gacchanti : go
taamasaahaa : established in tamas

Parents are always watchful of their children's behaviour, because the values that are inculcated in childhood stay with us throughout our life. If parents notice that their child is lazy and remains idle all the time, they will first motivate him through selfish desires. They will teach him that if he studies hard and works hard, he will be able to buy fast cars, electronic gadgets, a big house and so on. Once he has risen from a tamasic state to a rajasic state, and has made enough money, his parents will encourage him to slowly start transitioning from rajasic action to selfless, sattvic actions like donating money to charity, volunteering and so on.

Shri Krishna gives us a similar roadmap for our evolution in this shloka. He says that once we have determined our degree of rajas and tamas, we should consciously perform the actions necessary to uplift our mental state. If we are primarily tamasic in nature, we should perform rajasic actions. If we are primarily sattvic in nature, we should perform sattvic actions. He also puts the responsibility of self improvement squarely on our shoulders. No other person can make this happen. The will to self improve must come from within.

Let us imagine for a moment that we are able to uplift ourselves to the level of sattva, where we are able to remain in a sattvic state for a majority of the day, as a consequence of performing sattvic, selfless actions. Is this our goal, or is this yet another milestone in our spiritual journey? The thirteenth chapter taught us that we have become the individual soul, the jeeva, the Purusha, by forgetting our true nature as the eternal essence. We have further become entangled in Prakriti by identifying with a mind and body that are under the influence of the gunas. Once we are able to stay in sattva, and minimize the effects of rajas and tamas, how do we then disentangle ourselves from Prakriti? Shri Krishna picks up this topic next.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 14

*naanyam gunebhyaha kartaaram yadaa drishtaanupashyati |
gunebhyashcha param vetti madbhaavam sodhigacchati || 19 ||*

When the beholders views no other doer than the gunaas, and knows himself as transcending the gunaas, he attains my nature.

Let us now introduce a new character into our recurring example, a CEO of a television channel. He is the father of the young child who, as we have seen earlier, is addicted to watching boxing matches. These matches are broadcast on the very same channel that the CEO owns. What is the difference between the child and the CEO? The CEO has set up the machinery of the television channel. He knows how the shows are recorded, edited and broadcast. When he comes home, he watches the channel as a detached observer. But the child, due to his addiction, gets affected by the blows received by the boxer in the boxing match.

The CEO keeps reminding his son to not get so attached to the boxing match since it is not real, it is just a television program. Once the child has identified himself as the boxer, he will have to accept all the consequences of that character in that particular TV show. In the same way, Shri Krishna urges us to not get trapped in the machine called Prakriti. If we identify with Prakriti, which is nothing but the three gunas, then we have to accept all its laws including birth, death, rebirth, joy, sorrow and so on. We have to understand that we neither do anything, nor do we experience the result of our actions. All action and reaction is within the realm of Prakriti. Once we establish ourselves as a witness, we understand that we have incorrectly taken on action and reaction upon ourselves.

Knowing this reality, however, does not mean that Prakriti will go away. Even if the child has stopped identifying with the boxer, the boxing match will be broadcast every day at 8 PM. Similarly, even if we are not bound by it, Prakriti will be tangible and visible to us during our waking hours. The entire universe, including the body that we are identified with, is made up of the three gunas of Prakriti. But despite it appearing to us as an apparent reality, Prakriti will be unable to bind us with its laws once we recognize it as an illusion, and not as reality. Once we are able to rise beyond identification with the three gunas, we will see Prakriti the way Ishvara sees Prakriti, as a detached

na : no
anyam : any other
gunebhyaha : gunaas
kartaaram : doer
yadaa : when
drishtaa : beholder
anupashyati : views
gunebhyaha : gunaas
cha : and
param : transcending
veti : knows
madbhaavam : my nature
saha : he
adhigacchati : attains

observer. In this manner, when we realize our identity with Ishvara, we will attain the state of liberation, of self realization.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 14

*gunaanetaanateetya treendehee dehasamudbhavaan |
janmamrityujaraaduhkhaurvimuktomritamashnute || 20 ||*

Having gone beyond these three gunaas, the creators of the body, the body dweller is freed from sorrow of birth, death and old age, and attains immortality.

gunaan : of the gunaas
etaan : these
ateetya : gone beyond
treen : three
dehee : body dweller
dehasamudbhavaan : creators of the
body
vimuktaha : freed
amritam : immortality
ashnute : attains

Shri Krishna now conveys the gist of the fourteenth chapter in this shloka. He says that Prakriti, which is comprised of the three gunaas, creates this entire universe, including our body. As long as the individual soul, the jeeva, the body dweller identifies with this body and gives reality to it, he experiences sorrows throughout his life. Once the jeeva stops identifying with the body which is the product of the three gunaas, he attains liberation and becomes immortal.

This shloka also connects the main theme of the prior chapter to this chapter. In the thirteenth chapter, we learnt that ignorance of our true nature creates an entity called the Purusha, which in essence is nothing but a bundle of unfulfilled desires. Now here, we learn that these unfulfilled desires, also known as avidyaa, ignorance or maaya, attract a combination of sattva, rajas and tamas that becomes the physical body. Only when the Purusha severs his connection with this body by rising above the three gunaas, he realizes his true nature as the eternal essence.

Immortality in this context does not mean physical immortality. The body follows the laws of nature. Everything in nature has to perish, including our physical body. From the perspective of Prakriti, the body will die. But the dehi, the body dweller, having gone beyond the three gunas, having stopped identifying with the three gunas, knows that he is untouched and unaffected by the laws of Prakriti. For him, the modifications of the body such as old age and disease are as if they are happening to some third party. This ultimate freedom from the influence of the Prakriti is what makes him immortal.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 21, Chapter 14**Arjuna uvaacha:**kairlingaistreengunaanetaanateeto bhavati prabho |**kimaachaaraha katham chaitaanstreengunaantivartate || 21 ||*

Arjuna said: By which signs is the one who has gone beyond the three gunas known, O Lord? What is his behaviour, and how does he transcend these three gunas?

kaihi : which
 lingaihi : signs
 treen : three
 gunaan : gunas
 etaan : these
 ateetaha : one who has gone beyond
 bhavati : is
 prabho : O Lord
 kimaachaaraha : what is his behaviour
 katham : how
 cha : and
 etaan : these
 treen : three
 gunaan : gunas
 ativartate : transcend

We hear Arjuna speak after a long time in this shloka. Arjuna usually speaks when he needs to clarify a doubt, or when he thinks that he needs a more practical version of what he has just heard. We have seen this happen several times. In the second chapter, Arjuna wanted to know the marks of the person who is established in knowledge, sthitha prajnya. Arjuna also asked the signs of a perfected devotee in the chapter on bhakti yoga. Every time he has asked a question, we as listeners have benefitted tremendously.

Having heard a detailed explanation around the three gunas, but only a couple of shlokas on the person who transcends those gunas and attains immortality, Arjuna found it appropriate to ask a question at this juncture. He wanted to know three things. First, how does one know that a person has transcended the three gunas. Second, how does such a person behave in the world. Third, how does he actually transcend the three gunas.

We have to constantly remind ourselves that everything we learn from this chapter is purely for self-analysis, not for judging or evaluating someone else. The only person that can accurately determine whether our mental state is sattvic, rajasic or tamasic is none other than ourselves. There is another aspect to learning about the signs of one who has gone beyond the influence of the gunas. Until we reach the state of liberation, these signs are attributes that we should aspire to cultivate in our lives.

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 22, Chapter 14**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**prakaasham cha pravrittim cha mohameva cha paandava |
na dveshti sampravrittaani na nivrittaani kaankshati || 22 ||*

prakaasham : light
 cha : and
 pravrittim : activity
 cha : and
 moham : delusion
 eva : even
 cha : and
 paandava : O Paandava
 na : not
 dveshti : hate
 sampravrittaani : present
 na : not
 nivrittaani : absent
 kaankshati : yearn

Shree Bhagavaan said: When light, activity and delusion are present, O Paandava, he does not hate them, nor does he yearn for them when they are absent.

Shri Krishna answers Arjuna's question - what are the marks of one who has transcended the gunas - in this shloka. Light, activity and delusion refer to sattva, rajas and tamas respectively. One who is indifferent to the rise and fall of each guna, one who has a high degree of detachment and discrimination, one who lets the gunas come and go with ease, such a person has transcended the gunas. It is the difference between one who observes suitcases on an airport conveyor belt versus one who holds on to a suitcase and doesn't let go. The one who insists on holding on gets pulled away.

When we are on vacation, our mind feels peaceful and relaxed. But when we come back from vacation, our mind becomes agitated since it has to get back to the nine to five routine of life. We want to hold on to that state of mind we had experienced when we were on vacation. In other words, we have an insistence, also known as aagraha, to hold on to a sattvic state when rajas comes in. Or when the alarm bell rings in the morning, we want to hold on to that sleepy tamasic state as long as possible, and not leave the bed. This aagraha, this insistence on holding on to one guna and not accepting the arrival of another guna, enables the gunas to control us. One who has transcended the gunas has given up this insistence through extreme vairagya or detachment.

Let's look at it in another way. When we read comics, we can see what the characters are thinking through thought bubbles. For example, if Veronica insulted Archie, Archie would have a thought bubble that says "I feel so bad". We temporarily feel sorry for Archie, and move on to the next frame in the comic. But if someone insults us in real life, we don't usually move on that quickly. We hold on to that thought, as well as the tamasic or rajasic state of mind created by that thought, for weeks, months, or years to come. And that is not all. We bring up that mental state each time we meet the person who insulted us.

When we are able to treat our thoughts with the same detachment that we do when we are reading other people's thoughts in comic books, we will know that we have gone beyond the gunas.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 23, Chapter 14

*udaaseenavadaaseeno gunairyo na vichaalyate |
gunaa vartante ityeva yovatishthathi nengate || 23 ||*

One who sits like an indifferent person, is not agitated by the gunas, who, knowing that the gunas interact with each other, is firmly situated and does not move.

Previously, Shri Krishna indicated the mental state of one who has transcended the gunas. He now addresses the second question - how does one who has gone beyond the gunas behave in this world. He says that such a person lives life with ease and grace. He is like the graceful elephant who walks on the road, unaffected by the horde of dogs that is barking at him. We have come across such people ourselves, who remain calm and unperturbed even when facing their darkest personal challenges.

What makes a person so calm? There are two factors. First, even though such a person may not look like a monk from the outside, he has a great deal of detachment towards the world. Second, such a person is seated on an unshakeable platform, his own self. Both factors are possible through the conviction and constant awareness that the entire world, including one's own body, is a play of the three gunas. It is the difference between getting swept away by the waves or sitting calmly on the beach. It is the difference between participating in a street fight or observing the fight from a second floor balcony.

What does all this mean in practice? It means when our mind is agitated, we will not crave for a peaceful state. We will accept that a certain level of agitation, a certain level of rajas is part and parcel of daily life. We will simply watch that mental state arise, persist, and go away, only to be replaced by another state. We will view the whole world as the gunas interacting with the gunas. The "I" within us will be firmly seated in itself, with a healthy level of distance and detachment from the movement of those gunas. It will stop identifying, giving importance, giving reality to the play of gunas. The gunas will move, but the "I" within us will not.

udaaseenavat : indifferent person
aaseenaha : seated
gunaihi : through gunas
yaha : one who
na : not
vichaalyate : agitated
gunaaha : gunas
vartante : interact
iti : in this manner
eva : only
yaha : one who
avatishthathi : situated firmly
na : does not
ingate : move

Bhagavad Gita Verse 24, Chapter 14

*samaduhkhasukhaha svastaha samaloshtashmakanchanaha |
tulyapriyaapriyo dheerastulyanindaatmasamstuti || 24 ||*

He to whom sorrow and joy are same, he who is established in his self, who regards mud, stone and gold as same, he who treats the dear and the detested as alike, he who is wise, he who treats insult and praise as alike.

sama : same
duhkhasukhaha : sorrow and joy
svastaha : established in his self
sama : same
loshta : mud
ashma : stone
kanchanaha : gold
tulya : alike
priya : dear
apriyaha : detested
dheeraha : wise
tulya : alike
nindaa : insult

aatmasamstutihi : one's praise

Shri Krishna continues to explain the conduct of one who has gone beyond the gunas. He says that such a person maintains a state of balance, a state of equanimity in his dealing with objects of the world and with people. Right from the second chapter, Shri Krishna has repeatedly emphasized the importance of maintaining samatva or equanimity in our lives, and does so again in this shloka. Only he who has transcended the gunas can maintain this level of equanimity. Such a person is termed "dhira" or wise, and "svastha" meaning self-established or healthy by Shri Krishna.

Three types of objects are mentioned in this shloka : a lump of clay, a stone, and a piece of gold. The person who has transcended the gunas will understand the real-world, practical difference in value of all these three objects. He will also know that at some times, some of these objects will bring joy, and some of these objects will bring sorrow. When he has to rush to the hospital to deal with a medical emergency, no piece of gold can bring him joy. He will continually maintain the awareness that clay, stone and gold, and the subsequent joy and sorrow that they bring, are nothing but the gunas playing with themselves. With this knowledge, he will maintain his balance and equanimity.

Now we look at how such a person deals with people. When people praise us or act in our interest, they become dear to us. When they insult us or trouble us in any way, we begin to detest them. Just like objects, different types of people can generate different reactions in different circumstances. Friends can become rivals, relatives can become enemies, even families can fall apart within minutes. One who has learned to transcend the gunas will transact with people appropriate to the situation, but will never hold on to one person, or run away

from them. Praise, insult, friend, foe, all these are interactions between gunas. His "I", his self, has nothing to do with any of these.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 25, Chapter 14

*maanaapamaanayostulyastulyo mitraaripakshayoho |
sarvaarambhaparityaagee gunaateetaha sa ucchyate || 25 ||*

Alike in honour and in dishonour, alike towards friend or foe, abandoning all activities, such a person is called one who has transcended the gunas.

maanaapamaanayoho : in honour and dishonour
tulyaha : alike
mitraaripakshayoho : towards friend or foe
sarvaarambhaparityaagee : abandoning all activities
gunaateetaha : transcended the gunas
saha : such a person
ucchyate : called

Imagine that you are watching a stage production of Shakespeare's King Lear. Suddenly, in the middle of the play, the actor playing King Lear starts speaking his own dialogue instead of following the script. After a few minutes of commotion, the curtain is lowered. Later, when asked as to why he spoke his own lines, the actor asserted that he thought his own lines were better than Shakespeare's. It will be quite difficult for such an actor to get any more roles, or keep his existing roles, if he were to force his own views onto the script.

Shri Krishna says that the one who has truly renounced all activities, given all up notions such as "I am doing this, I am doing that", such a person can be called the one who has gone beyond the three gunas. Like actors in a play, all activities in the world are nothing but the gunas interacting with the gunas. If we harbour the notion that our "I" is somehow involved in these activities, we have identified ourselves with our body, which is nothing but a product of the gunas. Through discrimination and detachment, we can see ourselves as distinct and separate from the gunas.

Such a person who can maintain this detachment from the gunas is indifferent to what the world thinks of him. Honour and dishonour are the same to him. If a friend helps him, he does not get elated. If a foe troubles him, he sees it as an opportunity to further increase his vairagya or dispassion towards the world. Any time the thought that "I did this" or "I earned this" enters his mind, he immediately discards it and brings back the awareness that everything is happening in Prakriti, the three gunas.

So, with this shloka and the previous one, Shri Krishna answers the question, what is the conduct of one who has transcended the gunas.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 26, Chapter 14

*maam cha yovyabhichaarena bhaktiyogena sevate |
sa gunaansamateetyaitaanbrahmabhooyaaya kalpate || 26 ||*

maam : my
cha : and
yaha : he who
avyabhichaarena : unwavering
bhakti : devotion
yogena : with yoga
sevate : worship
saha : he
gunaan : gunas
samateetya : gone beyond
etaan : these
brahmabhooyaaya : attaining Brahman
kalpate : fit

And he who worships me with the unwavering yoga of devotion, having gone beyond these gunas, becomes fit for attaining brahman.

Since this chapter is coming to an end, let us do a quick recap. We learned that this entire universe, including our mind and body, is nothing but the play of the three gunas of Prakriti - sattva, rajas and tamas. Only when we learn to stand apart from the gunas, when we separate ourselves from the gunas, can we attain liberation from the endless cycle of sorrow known as samsara. For most of us, such a high degree of discrimination is extremely difficult. Moreover, such discrimination needs to be combined with dispassion as well as total control of the mind and the sense organs.

Knowing the impediments of fulfilling all these requirements, Arjuna wanted to know whether there was a straightforward way of releasing oneself from the influence of the gunas. Shri Krishna says that yes, it is possible. The answer is the yoga of unwavering devotion, which was the topic of chapters seven to twelve. In a nutshell, we detach ourselves from the gunas by attaching ourselves to something higher, which is Ishvara. It is like the child who gives up his toys because he loves poetry now that he is a teenager.

This yoga of devotion is not completely without effort, however. Shri Krishna adds an adjective that we need to bear in mind - avyabhichaarena or unwavering. We cannot keep Ishvara as our goal from 7 am to 8 am and then start thinking about how to demolish our competitors from 8 am to 11 am. The one and only goal should be Ishvara. If all our goals are within the scope of our svadharma, our prescribed role in this world, they very naturally are part and parcel of our devotion towards Ishvara.

Having made Ishvara our only goal, and having maintained such an awareness throughout our life, we become fit to attain brahman. How does that happen? The next and last shloka of this chapter addresses this topic.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 27, Chapter 14

*brahmano hi pratishthaahamamritasyaavyayasya cha |
shaashvatasya cha dharmasya sukhasyaikaantikasya cha || 27 ||*

For, I am the abode of brahman, the immortal, the imperishable, the eternal constitution, and of absolute joy.

brahmanaha : brahman
hi : for
pratishthaa : abode
aham : I am
amritasya : immortal
avyayasya : imperishable
cha : and
shaashvatasya : eternal
cha : and
dharmasya : constitution
sukhasya : of joy
aikaantikasya : absolute
cha : and

The thirteenth chapter of the Gita explained the topic of jnyaana yoga or the yoga of knowledge. One of the topics in that chapter was the description of nirguna brahman, which is the eternal essence in its purest state. Shri Krishna described the technique of mentally removing the upaadhis - the veiling of the organs, the senses and so on - to get to the eternal essence that is at the core all of us. One who attained this eternal essence through jnyaana yoga achieved liberation or moksha. Arjuna recollected this teaching, and a doubt arose in his mind. What was that doubt?

In the previous shloka of this chapter, Shri Krishna asserted that liberation would be attained by the one who has undivided devotion towards Ishvara. But in the previous chapter, Shri Krishna had said that the fruit of knowing the eternal essence in its purest state, nirguna brahman, also resulted in liberation. To address Arjuna's doubt about the difference between the two approaches, Shri Krishna says here that he, as Ishvara, is the abode of the pure eternal essence, of nirguna brahman. In other words, undivided devotion to Ishvara results in the same outcome as does the yoga of knowledge. He also describes this pure eternal essence as immortal, imperishable, eternal and full of joy, just like he did in the thirteenth chapter. Furthermore, he says that the eternal essence is attained through the dharma or constitution of devotion and knowledge.

Shri Shankaraachaarya provides further nuances to this explanation in his commentary. He says that Prakriti or maaya is a power of nirguna brahman. Just like the strength of a strong person is inseparable from the person itself, maaya is inseparable from nirguna brahman. Therefore, it is nirguna brahman, with the power of maaya, that is speaking to Arjuna as Ishvara. This is the connection between nirguna brahman - brahman without maaya - and saguna brahman - brahman with maaya. Saguna brahman is the abode, and the power, of nirguna brahman. And the methods to attain brahman - devotion and knowledge - are two sides of the same coin. With this message, Shri Krishna

concludes the fourteenth chapter.

om tatsatiti shreematbhagavatgitasupanishadsu brahmaavidyaayaam yogashaastre shreekrishnaarjunsamvade gunatrayavibhaagayogo naama chaturdashodhyaayaha || 14 ||

Summary of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 14

In the thirteenth chapter, we learned that our existence in this world is the result of a two-step problem. First, ignorance of our real nature creates this illusory but distinct entity called the Purusha or the jeeva. The jeeva gets trapped as a result of its attachment to the three gunas of Prakriti. In order to provide the means by which we can detach ourselves from the three gunas, Shri Krishna reveals this teaching in the fourteenth chapter.

He begins by glorifying this knowledge, and by revealing its fruit as liberation or moksha. He reiterates that the combination of the awareness aspect and the material aspect of Ishvara gives rise to this entire universe. The jeeva, the awareness aspect of Ishvara present in each of us, identifies with Prakriti, the material aspect. This identification, a product of ignorance, ensnares us in the endless cycle of birth and death in various kinds of wombs.

Next, we are led through a detailed analysis of Prakriti. Like the driver who erroneously identifies with someone else's car and bears the consequences of that identification, we identify with the three gunas erroneously and are bound by their characteristics. Sattva binds through attachment to joy and knowledge. Rajas binds through attachment to action. Tamas binds through attachment to heedlessness, laziness and sloth. Only one guna dominates at one time. When one guna is strong, it overpowers the others.

Shri Krishna gives us the effects of each guna so that we can look within to understand the proportion of gunas within us. If we are full of radiance and knowledge, sattva prevails. If we are greedy all the time, and it results in desire and action, rajas prevails. If we are full of ignorance, heedlessness and error - tamas prevails.

Our fate after death is also determined by our predominant mental state at the time of death. A sattvic state leads a jeeva to come into a family of knowledge and improve its chance of liberation. A rajasic state leads it into a materialistic and action oriented family. A tamasic state leads a jeeva to take birth as animals or plants, hurting its chances of liberation. But to achieve liberation, we need to transcend all the three gunas.

Arjuna asks the question - what are signs of one who has transcended the three gunas? Shri Krishna replies - it is one who is not impacted, affected or attached to any of the gunas. Such a person views the en-

tire universe, including his body, as gunas acting upon gunas. How does such a person behave in the world? He shows complete and utter equanimity towards objects, situations and people at all times. And how does one transcend the gunas in practice? Only through single pointed devotion to Ishvara, since Ishvara is the abode of nir-guna brahman, the unconditioned and pure eternal essence. We need to detach from Prakriti and attach ourselves to Ishvara.

Purushottam Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 15**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**oordhvamoolamadhahashaakhamashvattham praahuravyayam |
chhandaamsi yasya parnaani yastam veda sa vedavita || 1 ||*

oordhvamoolam : roots above
 adhahashaakham : branches below
 ashvattham : Ashvattha tree
 praahuhu : is said
 avyayam : imperishable
 chhandaamsi : Vedas
 yasya : of whose
 parnaani : leaves
 yaha : who
 tam : that
 veda : knows
 sahe : he
 vedavita : Vedas

Shree Bhagavaan said:With roots above and branches below, the Ashvattha tree is said to be imperishable, with the Vedas as its leaves. He who knows this, knows the Vedas.

Shri Krishna begins the fifteenth chapter describing an unusual sort of tree. It is "oordhvamoolam adhahashaakham". It is upside down, with roots above and branches below. It is not as unusual as it sounds, because we encounter several trees that are inverted in our lives. A family tree, the map of an organization with the CEO on top, a decision tree in management sciences, all of these trees are upside down, with their root on top and branches below.

Such inverted trees have some interesting characteristics. The farther away one goes from the root, the greater is the loss of the substance or the essence. A junior employee has far less power than the CEO in an org chart, for instance. Also, these trees are never static. They keep changing. Hence, the tree described in this illustration is called "ashvattha", which means not lasting for long. This is also the name of the tree known as ficus religiosa, or the Peepul tree in India.

Now, let us examine the metaphors used in this illustration. The root of this tree is Ishvara, the saguna brahman, the eternal essence with form. Its branches have evolved from Ishvara, and are nothing but the hardening of Prakriti, the hardening of the three gunas due to their permutations and combinations. The process of the creation of the universe has been explained in detail in prior chapters. It is similar to a tender, subtle sapling hardening into a robust tree as it grows over time. It is termed as avyayam or imperishable because it is permanent after its reality has been ascertained, like the illusion of the blue sky. Even when we come to know that the sky is not really blue, but just looks that way, we still perceive the illusion.

In any complex system, there are rules that tell how what to do and what not to do. The Vedas are the rules of this universe, and are metaphorically represented as the leaves of this ashvattha tree. Just like there are rules on how to get promoted in a corporation, there are

rules in the Vedas that give us instructions on how to act in life, and how not to commit sins or errors. They are the storehouse of knowledge and actions needed to thrive in this world. One who knows the functioning of the universe in this manner, one who knows how to get to the source which is Ishvara, needs to know nothing else.

We now come to the fundamental question. Why has Shri Krishna started talking about this tree now? It is to cultivate dispassion or vairagya in us. Even a tinge of attachment to the world can derail our spiritual progress. Over the next few shlokas, we will learn more about this tree so that we can understand our entanglement in it, and consequently, learn how to release ourselves from it through dispassion.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 15

*adhashchordhvam prasritaastasya shaakhaa gunapravridha vishayapraavaalaa-
haa |*

adhashcha moolanyanusantataani karmaanubandheeni manushyaloke || 2
||

**Its branches are spread below and above, nourished by the gunas.
Sense objects are its sprouts, and, below in the human realm, stretch
its roots that bind through actions.**

adhaha : below
cha : and
oordhvam : above
prasritaahaa : spread
tasya : of that
shaakhaa : branches
gunapravridha : nourished by gunas
vishayapraavaalaa : sprouts are sense
objects
adhaha : below
cha : and
moolani : roots
anusantataani : stretching
karmaanubandheeni : binding due to
actions
manushyaloke : human realm

Shri Krishna began describing an upside-down tree as a metaphor for the material world in the prior shloka. Here, he continues to describe it in more detail. When its buds or sprouts grown into branches and touch the ground, they turn into roots that embed firmly into the ground, and then grow into several additional trunks around the main tree. Such gigantic tree structures are common in the Banyan tree family. Over a period of time, a small tree with one trunk becomes a mini forest in itself.

Our lives are no different. For many people, the American dream comprises owning a large house, two cars, good schools for children, a big screen TV and so on. First, the newly married family takes out a big loan to buy a house. The house is empty, so it needs furniture and appliances. The garage is empty, so two cars need to be purchased. The living room is empty, so a large screen TV is needed. The TV requires a cable connection, a DVD player, a Playstation and so on endlessly. The one purchase of a house led to other purchases, which led to other purchases and so on. This is nothing but the upside down tree of samsara playing out in our lives.

So this tree of samsara, made up of the three gunas of Prakriti, grows and expands through repetitive chasing of sense objects. Each sense object generates desires, desires generate actions to get those sense objects, and attainment of sense objects creates further desires. Actions bind us by making us giving importance to the branches of the tree, by making us run away from Ishvara, who is at the root of the tree. How do we tackle this problem? Shri Krishna gives the solution in the next shloka.

Notes

1. Computer scientists will recognize the tree of samsara as a recursive process.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 15

na roopamasyeha tathaapalabhyate naanto na chaadirna cha sampratishthaa
 |
ashvatthamenam suviroodhamoolamsangashastrena dridhena chhittvaa || 3
 ||

Its form is not available here, neither its beginning nor its end, not its existence. Having cut this firm-rooted Ashvattha tree using the robust weapon of dispassion.

Most of us love to see the image of planet earth from space. The majesty of that image captured by countless satellites over the years never fails to attract us. But without those satellites, we would never know that the earth looks like it does, because we did not have the means to see the big picture by ourselves. Or take a factory worker employed in a multi billion dollar multinational. All he gets to see is his machine for eight to ten hours a day. Except the CEO and a few other senior people, no one has the big picture view of the complex organization available.

Similarly, Shri Krishna says that most of us do not have the big picture view of our existence in this world. We simply live out our lives in the endless chain of attraction to sense objects, desire, action, result and further desire. To lift us out of this narrow view of life, he very compassionately gives us the illustration of the tree of samsara in the previous two shlokas.

He very clearly states that no matter who we are, whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated, fit or sick, we are all entangled in this upside down tree of samsara. We never see our existence as it really is. We do not see its beginning, middle or end. It is in fact, a gigantic illusion that has been given reality due to the long standing ignorance of our true nature.

The message of this shloka carries over into the next shloka.

na : not
 roopam : form
 asya : this
 iha : here
 tathaa : like
 upalabhyate : available
 na : no
 antaha : end
 na : not
 cha : and
 aadihi : beginning
 na : not
 cha : and
 sampratishthaa : existence
 ashvattham : ashvattha tree
 suviroodhamoolam : with firm roots
 asangashastrena : weapon of dispassion
 dridhena : robust
 chittvaa : having cut

Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 15

*tataha padam tatparimaargatavyam yasmingataa na nivartanti bhooyaha |
tameva chaadyam purusham prapadye yataha pravrittihi prasritaa puraanee
|| 4 ||*

Then that goal should be sought, having attained which, none return again. I seek refuge in that original Purusha from which has sprung this ancient sprout.

A family of tourists is driving around in a new city without the help of a map or a GPS device. A left turn here, a right turn there, and they are utterly lost. The wife asks the husband to stop the car and ask a shopkeeper for directions. The husband says no, and continues driving in circles for an hour. The wife yells at the husband who finally agrees to ask a shopkeeper for directions. This is an all too common occurrence. Unless the ego is surrendered, even material knowledge is far from reach.

Shri Krishna says : All of you are thoroughly lost in the cycle of action and reaction, the tree of samsaara. So take refuge in me. I am the original Purusha, the root from which this tree of samsaara has sprung up. I have created this universe like a magician creates his illusion. Don't get lost in the branches of the tree which are fueled by the three gunas of Prakriti. Come straight to the source, which is me. I am giving you a hand to save you from drowning in samsaara. Hold it tightly and do not let it go. This is the meaning of the word prapatti, which had also come up in the seventh chapter.

This prapatti, this seeking of refuge in Ishvara will help us cultivate dispassion towards samsaara. But this dispassion will not come overnight, it will come gradually. First, karma yoga has to be practised as prescribed by Shri Krishna. We should reduce selfish actions, increase selfless actions, then drop our attitude of doership. We cannot have it both ways - we cannot love Ishvara and love the material world at the same time. If we cannot control our mind and senses, we have yet to cultivate real devotion for Ishvara. Devotion, coupled with dispassion towards the world, will result in our liberation, the goal from which we will not have to return back to the material world.

tataha : then
padam : goal
tat : that
parimaargatavyam : sought
yasmin : by which
gataaha : having attained
na : not
nivartanti : return
bhooyaha : again
tam : that
eva : only
cha : and
aadyam : original
purusham : Purusha
prapadye : seek refuge
yataha : from whom
pravrittihi : sprung
prasritaa : sprout
puraanee : ancient

Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 15

*nirmaanamohaa jitasangadoshaa adhyaatmanityaa vinivrittakaamaahaa |
dvandvairvimuktaahaa sukhaduhkhasangnairgachhantyamoodhaahaa padamavyayam
tat || 5 ||*

Free from pride and delusion, with the defect of attachment conquered, always dwelling in the self, liberated from the pairs of opposites known as joy and sorrow, ignorance-free individuals attain that imperishable goal.

If one has to seek refuge in Ishvara, per the previous shloka, what should be the qualifications of such a seeker? This complex and elaborate topic has been very nicely packed into one shloka by Shri Krishna. The first qualification of a seeker is the absence, or at least, reduction of the sense of I and mine. Candidates who are interviewing for a new position frequently pass off an entire team's effort as their own. It is very easy to spot the inflated sense of pride in them. And even if they spent a few minutes contributing to a project, they still have the notion that it is their project, nobody else's. Shri Krishna says that this I and mine notion, this pride and delusion has to go away in a seeker.

Once the I and mine notion has diminished to some extent, the seeker has to focus on where is he stuck, where is his attachment in this world. Some may be attached to their profession, some may be attached to their family, some may be perversely attached to their enemies also. But, if we slowly unwind the attachments towards their source, we will find that the seeker is attached to his body. The attachment to the body, and the consequent fear of death, is the toughest attachment for the seeker to tackle. A certain level of dispassion towards the body, accomplished through control of the mind and senses, is a prerequisite to worship of Ishvara. When this happens, desires that are a by product of attachment, also diminish.

So, two qualifications are covered so far: absence of I and mine notion, and conquering one's attachments. Only then will we be able to focus on the main goal, which is daily absorption in the self, adhyaatma nitya. But how do we remain in this state constantly? By being vigilant of labelling the two pairs of opposites - likes and dislikes, joy and sorrow, praise and censure and so on and so forth. Even a whiff of wind on either side of a tightrope walker is sufficient to bring him down. Likes and dislikes have the ability to distract us from

nirmaanamohaa : free from pride and delusion
jitasangadoshaa : conquered the defect of attachment
adhyaatmanityaa : always dwelling in the self
vinivrittakaamaahaa : abandoned all desires
dvandvairvi : from pairs of opposites
vimuktaahaa : liberated
sukhaduhkhasangnair : known as joy and sorrow
gachhanti : attain
amoodhaahaa : ignorance-free individuals
padam : goal
avyayam : imperishable
tat : that

our goal. We should not pay too much attention to them, just observe them silently as they come and go. This is forbearance or titkshaa. This will enable us to completely remove ignorance of the true nature of our self, and to reach the abode of Ishvara, described in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 6, Chapter 15

*na tadbhaasayate sooryaa na shashaanko na paavakaha |
yadgatvaa na nirvatante taddhaamam paramam mama || 6 ||*

**That in which the sun does not illumine, nor the moon, nor fire,
that is my supreme abode. Having attained that, there is no return.**

Shri Krishna listed the qualifications of a seeker in the prior shloka, and asserted that one who takes his refuge will attain his abode. He now provides the location, the address of that abode. He says that there is no sun, no moon, no fire, in other words, no source of light in his abode. Initially we would feel a little frightened if we take the literal meaning of this shloka. Even cavemen were able to access some light source in the form of the sun, the moon, or fire from a wooden torch. Why would anyone want to go to such a place?

The sun, the moon and fire have symbolic interpretations which are extremely relevant here. The sun is the presiding deity of our intellect, the moon of our mind and emotions, and fire of our physiological functions. The one who has sought refuge in Ishvara automatically gives up affinity to his body, mind, intellect, ego (which resides in the intellect) and physiological functions. If this affinity, the root of all our sorrow, is given up, such a person will never again get caught in the wheel of birth of death, in the cycle of samsaara. This is liberation.

So then, this is the abode of Ishvara, of self realization, of liberation. Having reached there, the liberated person does not come back to the state of ignorance. He never gets deluded again. He never identifies or develops affinity with body, mind, intellect and the world. The duality, the pairs of opposites, the dvandva that was mentioned before, is nothing but the world. For such a person, neither joy nor sorrow, neither pain nor pleasure, neither friend nor enemy, nothing can destabilize him. This is liberation.

na : not
tat : that
bhaasayate : illumines
sooryaha : sun
na : not
shashaankaha : moon
na : not
paavakaha : fire
yat : which
gatvaa : attained
na : not
nirvatante : return
tat : that
dhaamam : abode
paramam : supreme
mama : my

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 15

*mamaivaansho jeevaloke jeevabhootaha sanaatanaha |
manahashashthaaneendriyaani prakritisthaani karshati || 7 ||*

mama : my
eva : only
anshaha : fragment
jeevaloke : in this world of souls
jeevabhootaha : becomes the individual soul
sanaatanaha : eternal
manahashashthaani : mind and five
indriyaani : senses
prakritisthaani : established in Prakriti
karshati : draws itself

My eternal fragment, in this world of souls, becomes the individual soul. It draws itself to the mind and five senses, established in Prakriti.

So far, we saw the state of the select few individuals who strive for liberation. Now Shri Krishna summarizes the state of the jeevas, the individual souls who are stuck in the cycle of samsaara, of birth and death. The jeeva, ignorant of its true nature which is infinite, harbours selfish desires with the aim of removing its finitude. In order to do so, it needs to be able to contact and transact with Prakriti. The equipment needed to transact with Prakriti comprises the mind and the five senses. Therefore, the jeeva attracts or pulls these six aspects of Prakriti unto itself.

Before we proceed, we need to clarify one point here. The word fragment implies that the eternal essence, speaking as Ishvara, can be broken or divided into pieces. Yet, we know that the eternal essence is indivisible. To solve this confusion, we need to remind ourselves of the examples provided in the thirteenth chapter. We can try to divide space using walls, but space is indivisible. Also, we can lose the sun's reflection when we break a pot filled with water, but nothing happens to the sun. There is no coming or going of space or of the sun. The limitations, the upaadhis such as walls and pots "as though" try to divide, but cannot do so in essence.

The Jnyaaneshwari provides yet another example. It describes an ascetic monk who has taken up a contemplative and solitary life in the jungle. One night he dreams that he is a householder with a wife and kids. In order to provide for his family, he has to work hard at his job to make ends meet. His job causes a great deal of stress to him. But when he wakes up from his dream, he remains the same monk, unaffected by the apparent ties of family life. The dream world is yet another upaadhi or limitation caused by ignorance of his real nature.

So then, the jeeva draws a mind and five senses in order to exhaust its desires. However, it still needs a physical body to transact with Prakriti. How does all this happen? We see this in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 15

*shareeram yadvaapnoti yachchaapyutkraamteeshvaraha |
griheetvaitaani samyaati vaayurgandhaanivaashayaat || 8 ||*

When the lord acquires a body, and when he leaves it, he takes them and departs, like the wind takes odours from their seats.

Earlier, we saw how the individual soul, the jeeva, wants to interact with Prakriti in order to exhaust its desires. In preparation to do so, it surrounds itself with the mind (which contains the desires) and the five senses. This collection of the jeeva, the mind and the senses is also known as the subtle body, because it is invisible. We can think of the subtle body as a computer file. Just as a computer file needs a computer to express itself, a subtle body needs a physical body to express itself. Whenever the timespan of one human body ends, the subtle body has to find another physical body to continue exhausting its desires.

Shri Krishna says that in such a situation, the subtle body, the jeeva with the mind and senses, ejects itself from the physical body and finds another body to settle in. It is similar to a international diplomat who goes from one assignment to another, taking his staff with him wherever he goes. Since the mind and senses follow the jeeva, it is referred to as Ishvara or the lord here, not to be confused with the meaning of Ishvara that has been used throughout the Gita. Once the jeeva finds a new home, it slowly starts unpacking its belongings, the mind and senses, in sequence. It is fascinating to see time-lapse videos of an embryo growing inside a mother's womb. This is the jeeva slowly gaining its faculties, which are nothing but accumulations of additional upaadhis.

Imagine that a small wooden box contains a strong perfume. If the box - the seat of the perfume - is opened, the fragrance will slowly start leaving the box and fill the room. Shri Krishna uses this analogy to explain the transfer of the jeeva from one physical body to another. If we bring in the analogy of the eternal essence as space, and combine it with this analogy, we will find that they fit together perfectly. Walls, fragrance, wind, boxes - all these limitations of space are apparent, not real. They are upaadhis, apparent limitations. Space does not care whether we build 2 walls or 2 million walls. No one or nothing can limit space. There is no coming and going of the perfume in space. It

shareeram : body
yat : when
avaapnoti : acquires
yat : when
cha : again
api : also
utkraamti : leaves
eeshvaraha : lord
griheetvaitaani : takes them
samyati : departs
vaayuhu : wind
gandhaan : odours
iva : like
aashayaat : seats

is only from a worldly standpoint that the fragrance is moving from the box to the room.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 9, Chapter 15

*shrotram chakshuhu sparshanam cha rasanam ghraanameva cha |
adhishtaaya manashchaayam vishayaanupasevate || 9 ||*

The ear, eye and touch, taste and smell, taking support of these and the mind, it enjoys the sense objects.

Shri Krishna continues explaining how the jeeva, the individual soul, takes up a human body to carry out its transactions with Prakriti. We can use the wonderful Vedantic text "Drig Drishya Viveka", or "Discrimination of the seer and the seen", to examine this process in a little more detail. It explains, with almost mathematical precision, how the eternal essence begins to think of itself as a finite human entity. There are two main players in this process. One is the eternal essence, which is of the nature of infinite awareness and existence, explained in great detail in the second chapter. Let us call it "Om" here. The second player is avidya or ignorance, which exists in the realm of the illusory Maaya.

When Om and ignorance come into contact with each other, a fragment of Om is reflected in ignorance, just like a fragment of the sun as though appears in the water of a pot. As we saw earlier, this fragment is called the jeeva. Ignorance creates an apparent limitation, also known as upaadhi, which imposes a sense of incompleteness or finitude upon the jeeva. The jeeva seeks the help of the upaadhi to remove its sense of completeness. The upaadhi can exist in one of many modifications or states. Let us examine these modifications. The sense organs are modifications of this upaadhi that can contact different aspects of Prakriti. The mind is a modification of this upaadhi that can take input from the sense organs, compare that input with its memory, and present a complete picture of what was contacted. The ego is another modification that thinks of itself as the "I", just like a low level manager thinks of himself as the owner of the factory in the absence of the real owner.

Now let us examine the content of this shloka. After the end of its journey in one body, the jeeva travels with the mind and senses, the upaadhi in other words, in search of another physical body. When the ego aspect of the upaadhi associates itself with a tiny physical body inside a womb, based on the desires it wants to exhaust, it develops the notion "I am this body". It now begins to use the body to transact with

shrotram : ear
chakshuhu : eye
sparshanam : touch
cha : and
rasanam : taste
ghraanam : smell
eva : only
cha : and
adhishtaaya : taking support
manaha : mind
cha : and
ayam : this
vishayaan : sense objects
upasevate : enjoys

the world. The human nose, for instance, is an inert object. But due to the association of the ego with the body, we think that the physical human nose is doing the smelling. The ego then uses the mind to generate the notion "I know that this smell is that of a rose". This finally leads the ego to generate the notion "This smell is pleasant, it makes me happy".

In this way, the jeeva gives up its power of reality, knowledge and happiness to the ego. The ego becomes the doer and the experiencer of the world. It has to constantly transact with the world in order to chase sense objects for happiness. It forgets the fact that it was happy to begin with. It gives reality to the domain of Prakriti, the three gunas, the visible and so called tangible world. But we should not forget that behind all this is the illusory mix up of Om and ignorance, the mix up of awareness and inertness. The Raamacharitamanas describes this mix up as "jada chetan ki granthi" or the knot between awareness and inertness.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 15

*utkramaantam sthitam vaapi bhunjaanam vaa gunaanvitam |
vimoodhaa naanupashyanti pashyanti jnyaanachakshuhu || 10 ||*

utkramaantam : leaves
sthitam : stays
vaa : and
api : also
bhunjaanam : experiences
vaa : and
gunaanvitam : that which endowed
with gunaas
vimoodhaa : deluded
na : not
anupashyanti : recognize
pashyanti : seen
jnyaanachakshuhu : those with the eye
of wisdom

That which leaves, stays and experiences, that which is endowed with gunaas, is not recognized by the deluded. It is seen by those with the eye of wisdom.

Let's recap our analysis of the previous shloka. We saw how a false "I" called the ego is created, by usurping the awareness or sentiency of the eternal essence. All this is possible through the illusory identification of the jeeva with the ego. Shri Krishna now wants to summarize and conclude the topic of the fall of the jeeva by distinguishing between those individuals who recognize, who know the lifecycle jeeva versus those who do not. He says that only those with the eye of wisdom can truly understand the notion of the jeeva as separate and distinct from the physical body, as well as the reason for its existence. Others cannot.

Most of us tend to think that the brain is sentient and self-aware, when it is inert and borrows awareness from the jeeva. Most of us think that what we our senses tell us is real, when it is actually nothing but the play of the three gunaas. Most of us derive enjoyment from the world, when our real nature is that of joy. Most of us think that the "I" is our ego, our ahankaara when it is actually the eternal essence. These incorrect beliefs are collectively termed as ajnyaana or ignorance.

The jnyaana chakshu, the eye of wisdom, refers to those people who have removed all of these incorrect notions. They do not hesitate to challenge any thought, idea, concept or emotion since all of this is in the plane of the three gunaas. On the other hand, most of us will not challenge the long held beliefs about the world that we are programmed with. Since we do not lost our fascination for the world even after being told several times by our scriptures, Shri Krishna addressed us as "vimoodha", completely deluded. How then, do those select few people gain the eye of wisdom? We will see in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 15

yatanto yoginashchainam pashyantyaatmanyavasthitam |
yatantopyakritaatmaano nainam pashyantyachetasaha || 11 ||

Those striving yogis realize this as residing within the self. But those with an unprepared mind, though striving, do not see this, devoid of knowledge.

yatantaha : those who are striving
yoginaha : yogis
cha : and
enam : this
pashyanti : realize
aatmani : within the self
avasthitam : residing
yatantaha : striving
api : though
akritaatmaanaha : unprepared mind
na : not
enam : this
pashyanti : see
achetasaha : devoid of knowledge

In any difficult endeavour, there are three kinds of people. There are the vast majority who are not interested the least bit in striving for the goal, and blissfully accept their state as a given. There are a small number of people who are putting in great effort or dedication, but not obtaining the desired outcome. A select few, however, are able to channelize their efforts in the right direction and get what they want.

Shri Krishna called the vast majority of people, the first category, stuck in the cycle of Prakriti "deluded" in the last shloka. Here, he says that it is the preparation of mind that determines whether or not the efforts taken by yogis - those who are striving for liberation - have a chance of success. One without a prepared mind is termed as "akritaatmaanaha" in this shloka. So then, those of us who are aiming for liberation would not like our striving to be in vain. What should we do?

We need to understand what Shri Krishna means by purifying our mind. There are two aspects to this. The first aspect is the degree of selfish desires. Unless we have followed the path of karma yoga and bhakti yoga as laid out in the earlier portions of the Gita, our mind will not be able to properly absorb any scriptural teaching whatsoever. The second aspect is the type of knowledge we are trying to absorb and the method of doing so. A systematic understanding of the scriptures under the guidance of a teacher is the only way. One who does not follow a systematic process of imbibing knowledge is termed "achetasaha", devoid of wisdom.

The topic of the jeeva is concluded in this shloka. with the message that only those with a pure mind and systematic study will truly understand the nature of the jeeva as the eternal essence as though limited by its upaadhis or conditionings.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 15

*yadaadityagatam tejo jagadbhaasayatekhilam |
yachhandramasi yacchaagnau tattejo viddhi maamakam || 12 ||*

That splendour which resides in the sun and illumines the entire world, that which is in the moon and in fire, know that splendour to be mine.

yat : that
aadityagatam : resides in sun
tejaha : splendour
jagat : world
bhaasayate : illumines
akhilam : entire
yat : that
chandramasi : in the moon
yat : that
cha : and
agnau : in fire
tat : that
tejaha : splendour
viddhi : know
maamakam : mine

So far we learned about the nature of the individual soul, the jeeva. But if that is all we focus on, we will have incomplete knowledge about our true nature. When we look around us, we see the world in all its beautiful yet complex glory. We need to investigate into the true nature of the world, and realize our identity and connection with that as well. With this view in mind, Shri Krishna now begins to explain his connection with the world around us.

He starts this topic by asserting that the splendour of the sun, the moon, and of fire is possible only because of Ishvara's splendour. We have tremendous awe for the sun's energy, without which life on this earth will not be possible. Shri Krishna says that the sun's splendour is not its own. It comes from the splendour of Ishvara. Symbolically, the sun represents the organs of perception such as the eyes, ears, nose and so on. Therefore, whenever any sentient being in this world, from a single celled amoeba to a human being becomes aware of something, that awareness, that consciousness, is the power of Ishvara at work.

So whenever we see awareness manifest itself in any organism, we should remind ourselves that the one Ishvara giving awareness to us is the same Ishvara giving awareness to the organisms in the world. In this manner, we can realize the identity of our nature with the world through the common link of awareness.

Furthermore, both the moon and fire derive their energy and splendour from the sun. The moon reflects the light of the sun. Fire also is the manifestation of the sun's energy on a much smaller scale. Therefore, energy in any form, whether it is dazzling like the sun, cooling like the moon, or warm like fire, is nothing but Ishvara's energy. How does this energy manifest itself in the world? Shri Krishna explains that in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 15

*gaamavishya cha bhootaani dhaaraayamyaham ojasaa |
pushnaami chaushadheehee sarvaahaa somo bhootvaa rasaatmakaha || 13 ||*

Entering the earth, I sustain all beings with my energy, and having become the nectar-giving Soma, I nourish all vegetation.

gaam : earth
aavishya : entering
cha : and
bhootaani : all beings
dhaaraayami : sustain
aham : I
ojasaa : energy
pushnaami : nourish
cha : and
aushadheehee : vegetation
sarvaahaa : all
soma : Soma
bhootvaa : having become
rasaatmakaha : nectar-giving

Physicists devote entire careers to the study of forces. Despite several advances in the field, they are yet to find the grand theory that unifies the different understandings of gravity, electromagnetism, atomic forces and so on. Shri Krishna says that it is Ishvara that enters the earth and sustains every being, every atom in it through his force. Just like there is a force holding our body together, there is a force that holds the earth as one entity. So whenever we admire the grandeur and majesty of earth's natural wonders, we should not forget that the very same force holds our body together as one cohesive unit.

Energy requires a medium to travel from its source to its destination. In order to provide nourishment to all living beings, Ishvara resides in the form of nectar, the sap, the essence of all vegetation. A healthy plant-life in any ecosystem ensures the prosperity of animals, birds and humans that depend upon it. Many commentators including Shri Shankaraacharya have translated Soma to mean the moon. It is said that the moon's light enhances the nutritional value of all plant life. This sap, this essence within the plants that gives energy to all life also gives us energy. Moreover, many herbs have medicinal value in addition to their nutritional value, providing yet another layer of benefits to all animals and humans.

In this manner, whether it is energy, nourishment or healing, Ishvara is pulsating through us in the very same manner that he is pulsating through the world. Now, this energy needs to be extracted from its source and absorbed into our bodies. We shall see how Ishvara makes this happen in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 15

*aham vaishvaanaro bhootvaa praaninaam dehamaashritaha |
praanaapaanasamaayuktaha pachaamyannam chaturvidham || 14 ||*

Residing in the bodies of all beings, I become Vaishvaanara. In conjunction with Praana and Apaana, I digest the four types of food.

aham : I
vaishvaanaraha : Vaishvaanara
bhootvaa : become
praaninaam : of all beings
deham : bodies
aashritaha : residing
praanaapaana : Praana and Apaana
samaayuktaha : in conjunction with
pachaami : digest
annam : food
chaturvidham : four types

Previously, we saw how Ishvara sustained and nourished all beings on this earth by providing them with nutrition in the form of plant life and vegetation. The energy stored in this food has to be absorbed and assimilated into all living beings. How does that happen? Shri Krishna says that Ishvara manifests himself as Vaishvaanara, the fire inside all living beings which represents the process of metabolism.

It is a wonder that we are able to eat such a large variety of food, and yet derive enough energy to keep our bodies running throughout our lives, all due to the functioning of the Vaishvaanara fire. It is supported by two vayus or forces known as the Praana and the Apaana vayus. The Praana vayu brings food towards the digestive organs. Vaishvaanara is the process of digestion and metabolism. The Apaana vayu pushes non-essential portions of the food out into the world.

We also come across the four types of food that are referenced in scriptures. These are : food that can be chewed such as rice, food that can be sucked such as mango nectar, food that can be drunk such as fruit juices, and food that can be licked such as pickles. The Vaishvaanara fire can convert all these types of food into energy for the body.

So we see that production, distribution and ultimate consumption of energy that happens in us, and happens in any other living being, is nothing but Ishvara. Ishvara is the producer, distributor and consumer. Remembering this topic is a great way to reduce our ego and see our oneness with the world. Many people in India, in fact, chant the 15th chapter before their meals in order to pray for good digestion.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 15

*sarvasya chaaham hridi sannivishito mattaha smritirjnyaanamapohanam cha
|
vedaishcha sarvairahameva vedyo vedaantakridvedavideva chaaham || 15 ||*

And I am seated in the hearts of all beings. From me arise memory, knowledge and their loss. It is only I who am to be known through the Vedas. Only I am the author of Vedanta, and the knower of the Vedas.

As humans, it is not enough for us to spend our lives seeking out sources of food for existence. We crave knowledge in all its forms - knowledge of the material world, how things work, history, geography, sciences and the arts. We also crave that knowledge which is not tangible but is part and parcel of our lives - aspirations, values, codes of conduct and so on. Shri Krishna says that he is both the producer and consumer of knowledge in our lives. The sum total of all knowledge is referred to as the Vedas in this shloka.

The assimilation of knowledge goes through three steps. In the first step, we do not know anything, this is the state of apohanam, absence of memory. Next, we know something, knowledge happens, this is jnyaanam. Finally, this knowledge is stored in memory, this is smriti. All these steps towards the acquisition of knowledge happen due to Ishvara, who is seated in our intellect, poetically referred to as hridi or intellect. So whenever we learn something new, or we recall something from our memory, we should understand that Ishvara is functioning as the subject and the object, the knower and the known, in this process of knowledge acquisition.

But that is not all. The ultimate knowledge, the entire theme of the Bhagavad Gita, is that knowledge which reveals the true nature of the self and its identity with Ishvara. It is handed down from a teacher to a student through tradition. It is found in the end, the conclusion, the anta of the Vedas. Therefore it is known as Vedanta. So the knowledge that reveals the true nature of the self is none other than Ishvara. In other words, only the self can know itself, a statement found in the Jnyaaneshwari's opening statement "jaya jaya sva samvedyaa" - salutations to that which knows itself.

With this shloka, Shri Krishna concludes the topic of Ishvara's man-

sarvasya : all beings
cha : and
aham : I
hridi : in hearts
sannivishita : seated
mattaha : from me
smriti : memory
jnyaanam : knowledge
apohanam : loss of memory
vedaihi : through Vedas
cha : and
sarvaihi : all
aham : I
eva : only
vedyaha : to be known
vedaantakrit : author of Vedanta
vedavit : knower of Vedas
eva : only
cha : and
aham : I

ifestations which began in the twelfth shloka. The change in metre reinforces the conclusion. We learned that ultimately, it is Ishvara that provides awareness, nourishment, food, and the power to absorb food as well as knowledge to all beings on this. Not only does he produce all of this, he consumes it as well. If we truly let this statement sink in, we will realize that our false "I", our ego, is nowhere to be found.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 15

*dvaamimau purushau loke ksharaakshara eva cha |
ksharaha sarvaani bhootaani kootasthokshara uchhyate || 16 ||*

dvaau : two
imau : these
purushau : beings
loke : in this world
ksharaha : perishable
aksharaha : imperishable
eva : also
cha : and
ksharaha : perishable
sarvaani : all
bhootaani : beings
kootasthaha : Kootastha
kshara : perishable
uchhyate : is called

There are two beings in this world, the perishable and the imperishable. All beings constitute the perishable, the Kootastha is called the imperishable.

Computer programmers love to create video games that can put the player in a gigantic virtual world where they can blow up aliens. What is interesting is that the same computer game can create a different world each time, with different kinds of aliens in different place. In other words, the infinitely complex virtual worlds created by the game can change, but the computer game program remains the same. Our visible universe is quite similar.

Shri Krishna begins to summarize the teaching of this chapter by asserting that everything in the world can be classified into two category. The first category comprises the visible world, the tangible world which comprises all living and inert beings. The second category comprises the invisible entity called Maaya. Maaya is like the computer game program that is invisible, yet has the power to create infinitely complex universes over and over again. The first category is termed kshara or perishable, because the universe has a beginning and end. The second category is termed akshara or imperishable, because it outlives the perishable.

So therefore, let's examine this teaching from two standpoints. From our standpoint, the standpoint of the "I" - the kshara, the perishable is our physical body. The akshara, the imperishable is the jeeva, as defined in the previous shlokas. From the standpoint of the world, the standpoint of the "that" - the kshara is the visible universe. The akshara refers to Maaya, the seed of infinite universes, present, past and future.

Let's now look at some of the terms used in the shloka. Koota means illusion, and therefore kootastha means that which can create several illusions. Another clarification is around the imperishability of Maaya. If Maaya is imperishable, how can we get out of it? The answer is that Maaya is imperishable till we realize our true nature and attain liberation. Each category is called a Purusha or a being because both of them are limitations or upaadhis of Ishvara, as we shall see in the

next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 15

*uttamaha purushastvanyaha paramaatmetyudaahyataha |
yo lokatrayamaavishya bibhartyavyaya eeshvaraha || 17 ||*

uttamaha : foremost
purushaha : person
tu : but
anyaha : distinct
paramaatma : supreme self
iti : in this manner
udaahyataha : spoken of
yaha : who
lokatrayam : in three worlds
aavishya : enters
bibharti : sustains
avyaya : imperishable
eeshvaraha : lord

But distinct is that foremost person, spoken of as the supreme self, the imperishable lord, who enters and sustains the three worlds.

As we saw earlier, a single video game program can create an infinite variety of complex worlds in the computer. Let us now pose the question - what is the core, what is the essence of these complex worlds? What is the purest state of these worlds? We need to peel the layers of an onion, as it were. The worlds are not real, they are created by a computer program. A computer program is not real, it is a series of instructions in a computer's memory. The instructions are not real, they are modifications of electricity. Ultimately, it is electricity that is creating and sustaining all of the worlds we see in a computer game.

Now, what if we pose the question - what is at the core of this world? If we get rid of all the limitations, what the purest state of this world? What is the purest state of our existence? The visible world is not real, because it is created by a play of the gunaas of Prakriti, and is perishable. Prakriti or Maaya is not real, though it is relatively imperishable, because it can be destroyed upon removal of our ignorance. What remains, is the eternal essence on which Maaya projects all its limitations or upaadhis.

Similarly, if we mentally remove our upaadhis or limitations, it will go something like this. Our body is a play of the gunaas, it is not real. Beyond the body are the senses and the mind, and they are comprised of gunaas and therefore not real. Beyond the senses and mind lies the eternal essence, untainted by Prakriti, which is the purest form of our "I". In other words, when we remove all of our upaadhis or limitations, we come to the same eternal essence that is reached when we remove the upaadhis of the visible world.

We had seen the identity of our "I" with the eternal essence, of aatman with brahman, in the thirteenth chapter as well. That very same eternal essence, the purest brahman or shuddha brahman is referred to as the imperishable lord in this shloka by Shri Krishna. The three worlds here refer to either heaven, earth and hell, or even our waking, dreaming and sleeping states. The eternal essence enters and sustains

all of them, but it is not some remote entity. It is the supreme self, the "I" residing within everyone.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 15

*yasmaatksharamateetohamaksharaadaapi choottamaha |
atosmi loke vede cha prathitaha purushottamaha || 18 ||*

For, I transcend the perishable and also am superior to the imperishable. Therefore, in the world and in the Vedas, I am well known as the foremost person.

Now, Shri Krishna reveals his true identity as Purushottama, the uttama Purusha, the foremost person, which is a poetic means of referring to the eternal essence, the pure brahman without any limitations. The root of the sanskrit word "uttama" is "ut" or high. This means that there is nothing higher than Purushottama. The imperishable, also known as Prakriti or Maaya, could be considered superior to the perishable world, because Prakriti is the cause and the world is its effect. Any cause is superior than its effect, just like the parents are superior to their children. Since Prakriti exists only as an adhyaasa, a projection on Purushottama, he is greater than anything else.

Let us also look at the significance of Purushottama by going deeper into what is meant by cause and effect. According to Vedanta, there are two types of causes. The material cause is the substance which makes the effect. A clay pot is made of clay, so its material cause, its upaadaana kaarana, is clay. But the pot did not make itself. There was an intelligence in the form of a potter that created the clay pot. This is the second type of cause is the nimitta kaarana, known as the intelligent or efficient cause.

Some schools of thought assert that the Purushottama is only the intelligent cause and not the material cause. He is like the potter who is distinct and separate than his creation. But in the Advaita school, the Purushottama is not only considered the intelligence behind creation, he is also the raw material behind the creation. The Mundaka Upanishad compares Purushottama to the spider who weaves the web from within himself, and eventually, pulls back the web into himself.

We should again not forget that this uttama Purusha, this foremost person, is nothing but our own self, our "I". In fact, uttama Purusha in Sanskrit grammatically means the first person, the "I". He is beyond the perishable tree of samsaara, and also beyond the seed of this tree in the form of Prakriti. What is the result of knowing this uttama

yasmaat : for
ksharam : perishable
ateetaha : transcend
aham : I
aksharaat : imperishable
api : also
cha : and
uttamaha : superior to
ataha : therefore
asmi : I am
loke : in the world
vede : in Vedas
cha : and
prathitaha : well known
purushottamaha : foremost person

Purusha? We will see in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 15

*yo maamevamasammoodho jaanaati purushottamam |
sa sarvavidbhajati maam sarvabhaavena bhaarata || 19 ||*

One who knows me in this manner, without delusion, knows me as the foremost person, he, knowing all, worships me from all viewpoints, O Bhaarata.

yaha : one who
maam : me
evam : in this manner
asammoodhaha : without delusion
jaanaati : knows
purushottamam : foremost person
saha : he
sarvavit : knowing all
bhajati : worship
maam : my
sarvabhaavena : from all viewpoints
bhaarata : O Bhaarata

It is said that once a travelling circus came to a village with a most unique attraction known as the tent of mirrors. Anyone who entered it would see a whole army of their own selves due to the mirrors reflecting back and forth indefinitely. A dog entered this tent, saw an infinite number of dogs that looked like him, was afraid and started barking in fear. A passerby went in to see what was going on. Now when he saw himself in those infinite reflections, he thought to himself - I see myself everywhere, how nice this is!

Shri Krishna says that when we see our "I" as no different from anyone or anything else, when we do not pay attention to the name and form but to the self or aatmaa that is the basis of all name and form, that is the correct way of knowing Purushottama, the foremost person. Any other way of conceptualizing Purushottama or the eternal essence will involve some degree of delusion, some trace of name and form involvement. Worship of Ishvara as a deity with name and form is an essential step in the direction of realizing the Purushottama who is beyond all name and form.

When one reaches this conclusion of one's spiritual journey, there is nothing else left to be known in this world. Such a person becomes sarvavit, all knowing. He will develop sarvaatma bhaava, he will see himself in everything and everyone. So then, no matter the viewpoint, whatever angle, whatever pursuit he will undertake after this knowledge, it will be in worship of this Purushottama. This is the grand message of the Bhagavad Gita.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 15

*iti guhyatamam shaastramidamuktam mayaanagha |
etadbuddhvaa buddhimaansyaatkritakriyashcha bhaarata || 20 ||*

Thus, this foremost secret has been taught to you by me, O sinless one. Having known this, one becomes wise and accomplishes all his duties, O Bhaarata.

When you ask the question - can you stop working right now and retire, you get a couple of answers. Some people say that they have still so many desires, so many plans to fulfill, that's why they cannot retire. Other people say that they still have so much to learn from the world, so much knowledge to acquire. Shri Krishna concludes this chapter by asserting that one who has truly understood the teaching of this chapter has accomplished whatever anyone can accomplish in this world, plus he has also known whatever can be known in this world.

Why does he say that whatever has to be known has been covered in this chapter? The highest knowledge to be known in this world is the understanding of three topics. What is the nature of the individual soul (who am I), what is this world and where did it come from, and what is beyond this world (is there a God). Any text that conclusively answers these three questions is termed a shaastra, a science. The fifteenth chapter of the Gita does so, and hence it is worthy of being termed a shaastra.

The method used to reveal Purushottama, the pure eternal essence, is to gradually move from the tangible to the intangible, from the visible to the subtle, from the visible universe to the invisible Prakriti to Purushottama who is beyond both. This method is known as Arundhati nyaaya, the technique of revealing the location of the star known as Arundhati. Here the teacher first points to a tree, then to one of its branches, then to one of its leaves, and then to the star that is right next to the tree. Without doing this step by step revelation, it would not have been possible to reveal the position of the star.

So then, the teaching of this chapter is called the foremost secret. It is secret because such knowledge is not accessible to any of these sense organs. It has to be revealed through a teacher who has had direct experience of the eternal essence. Furthermore, it has to be taught to a student who is straightforward and without sin like Arjuna. Shri

iti : thus
guhyatamam : foremost secret
shaastram : science
idam : this
uktam : taught
mayaa : by me
anagha : O sinless one
etat : this
buddhvaa : having known
buddhimaan : wise
syaat : becomes
kritakriyaha : one who has accomplished all duties
cha : and
bhaarata : O Bhaarata

Shankaraachaarya goes so far as to say that this chapter summarizes the teachings of all of the Vedic scriptures.

Summary of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 15

The fifteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita is unique in several respects. It is the shortest, with only twenty shlokas. On the other hand, it summarizes the entire essence of not just the Gita but also all the Vedas in those twenty shlokas. Specifically, it covers four topics that are at the essence of any spiritual scripture: what is the world, who am I, what is God or what transcends the world and me, and what is the relationship between me, the world and God.

The chapter first addresses the nature of the world. Our existence in this world is illustrated using an upside down tree, similar to a family tree. The root of this tree is Ishvara wielding the power of Prakriti, the saguna brahman, the eternal essence with attributes. Samsaara, our existence on this world, is the outward growth of this tree. This growth is fueled by sense objects which are in the form of sprouts or buds. Each sense object generates desires, which generates actions, which bind us to the branches of the tree.

The only way to rid ourselves of this endless cycle of desire and action is to cut the tree using the weapon of dispassion. The best way to cultivate dispassion is to go straight to the source of the tree, to take refuge in Ishvara. A seeker who wants to do so needs a list of qualifications such as freedom from pride and delusion. Only then will the seeker reach the abode of Ishvara, which is the state of self realization and liberation.

Next, the chapter addresses the state of the jeeva, the individual soul, the "I". From an absolute standpoint, there is one eternal essence, one consciousness, one self, one "I". But just like space seems like it is divided into many through walls, this eternal essence is as though divided into multiple "I"s through apparent limitations or upaadhis.

By attaching itself to upaadhis of the mind and the sense organs, an illusory self is created that imagines itself to be the jeeva, the individual soul. It takes up a new human body to exhaust the desires in its mind, but unfortunately picks up new desires and takes up yet another human body once the old one ceases to function. Only those individuals who have the eye of wisdom, who have assimilated the teaching of the scriptures after purifying themselves with karma and bhakti yoga, recognize the non-divided nature of the self. All others are living in delusion.

The third topic, the nature of God or Ishvara, is taken up next. We

learn that Ishvara is not some remote figure, but pervades every aspect of the universe. Ishvara provides awareness or the faculty to know. He provides energy through the sun, the moon and fire. This energy is circulated throughout the universe in the form of Soma or nectar, and also used for medicinal purposes. Metabolism, the faculty to extract energy from this food in the form of Soma, is manifested through Ishvara as the Vaishvaanara fire. Ultimately, all memory and knowledge is possible through Ishvara who resides in the hearts (intellect) of everyone.

The fourth topic deals with relationship between the individual, the world, and God. If we trace the energy source of a tiny mango sapling, and of a 100 megawatt solar power plant, we reach the same source - the sun. Similarly, if we mentally remove the apparent limitations, the upaadhis, the names and forms behind the individual, the world and of Ishvara, we find the foremost person, the Purushottama, the pure unadulterated eternal essence. It is beyond the perishable visible world and the imperishable seed of the visible world which is Prakriti.

In other words, we learn that the "I" in us is the "I" in everyone, the self of all.



Daivaasursampad Vibhaaga Yoga

*Bhagavad Gita Verse 1, Chapter 16**Shree Bhagavaan uvaacha:**abhayam sattvasamshuddhirjnyaanayogavysavasthithi |
daanam damashcha yajnyashcha svaadhyaayastapa aarjavam || 1 ||*

Shree Bhagavaan said: Fearlessness, purity of mind, steadfastness in the yoga of knowledge, charity, self control, worship, self study, penance and straightforwardness.

abhayam : fearlessness
sattvasamshuddhi : purity of mind
jnyaanayoga : yoga of knowledge
vysavasthithi : steadfastness
daanam : charity
damaha : self control
cha : and
yajnyaha : worship
cha : and
svaadhyaayaha : self study
tapaha : penance
aarjavam : straightforwardness

Some commentators believe that the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of the Gita are used to clarify points that were hinted at in the prior chapters, almost like an appendix. This chapter is one of the more practical chapters in the Gita, and picks up on a statement made in the ninth chapter where three types of people - divine, devilish and evil. It describes two sets of qualities, divine and devilish, so that we can do an assessment of where we stand, to understand which qualities to tone down and which qualities to emphasize.

Shri Krishna says that the first divine quality is abhayam or fearlessness. Once we realize that the universe is a play of Ishvara's Prakriti, and our role in it is to exhaust or desires, we automatically develop fearlessness. We are even able to be fearless of death, the greatest fear, because we have understood that death applies to the body, not to the self. Another source of fear is loss or harm caused to our property and our relationships. If we remove the label of mine from everything, and recognize that everything is Ishvara's, fear automatically goes away.

The next quality is sattva samshuddhi, purity of mind. Sattva here refers to the antahakarana, the mind and the senses, because they are created from the sattva aspect of Prakriti. The foremost indication of a pure mind is the absence of any thought of cheating someone else, or cheating oneself. Even if we know that someone has done something wrong, we should tactfully deal with the situation, without putting them on the spot, or by making fun of them.

Let's now look at what is meant by jnyaanam or knowledge. True knowledge is knowledge of our own self, the answer to the question who am I. This knowledge is passed on from teacher to student through detailed study and analysis of the scriptures. Also, yoga refers to any process that connect us to something higher. So then, the third quality of jnyana yoga avasthithi refers to the process of internalizing

this knowledge by withdrawing the sense organs and mind from the play of the world, and constantly abiding in this knowledge.

We have seen how the notion that something is mine or something is my property can become a hinderance in the spiritual journey. An easy way to counter this notion of mine-ness is to engage in daanam or charity, the fourth quality. Whenever we feel that our pride in our possessions is increasing, we should examine where it is coming from, and weed out the source of our pride through charity. However, charity cannot be performed haphazardly. We have to put a lot of thought into what we are giving, how we are giving, when we are giving and so on. This is covered in great detail in the seventeenth chapter.

Another obstacle in the spiritual journey is the importance we give to our sense organs. They are kept in check by the fifth quality which is damaha or sense control. The natural tendency of the sense organs is to demand objects that are pleasant to them, but probably not beneficial to our personality as a whole. The tongue wants unhealthy foods, for instance. But it is important to note that like anything else, moderation is prescribed rather than complete denial, which has its own problems.

The sixth divine quality is that of yajnya, a topic that was covered elaborately in the fourth chapter. Essentially, it means that our dealings with the world should be performed thoughtfully. We owe our daily existence to our teachers, our deities, our environment, our ancestors, our fellow human beings and to nature. The payoff of these debts gave rise to the five types of yajnyas that are prescribed in the scriptures. The culmination of the spirit of yajnya is the giving up of our sense of I, our identity, to Ishvara.

For most children, and even for adults, studying is a boring and dreadful exercise, something to be dispensed off quickly. But Shri Krishna says that studying of the Gita, the Vedas, the Puraanas, any spiritual text, is an essential quality of the seeker. The emphasis is on the word self, which has two implications. We should be forced to study by someone else. The inspiration should come from within. Also, we should perform introspection, and not use the teaching to analyze and improve other people.

Tapaha or penance and austerity is the eighth divine quality. Austerity is not to be taken literally where one retires into the jungle and shuns all worldly duties. It refers to the fulfilling of one's duties while staying firm in the face of any obstacles, and by not wasting time and

energy at the level of body, mind or intellect. Doing so requires patience and tact, but the payoff is the buildup of a reservoir of energy that can be channelized for spiritual pursuits. Further details on the various types of tapaha are found in the seventeenth chapter.

The ninth divine quality is aarjavam or straightforwardness. It refers to those who mean what they say and say what they mean. Their actions, speech and thought are aligned. There is no hint of crookedness or deceit in their dealings. It should be construed as being overly simple in a negative sense. Whenever we notice that we have strayed from this quality, it usually means that selfishness has entered into our system, and we need to correct it.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 2, Chapter 16

*ahimsaa satyamakrodhastyagaha shaantirapaishunam |
dayaa bhooteshvaloluptvam maardavam hreerachaapalam || 2 ||*

ahimsaa : non violence
satyam : truthfulness
akrodhaha : absence of anger
tyagaha : renunciation
shaantihi : tranquility
apaishunam : absence of slander
dayaa : compassion
bhooteshu : all beings
aloluptvam : lack of covetousness
maardavam : gentleness
hreehi : modesty
achaapalam : lack of fickleness

Non violence, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation, tranquility, absence of slander, compassion towards all beings, lack of covetousness, gentleness, modesty, lack of fickleness.

Twelve additional divine qualities are listed in this shloka. Ahimsaa refers to non violence, harmlessness, to not injure anyone intentionally or unintentionally. Harm to others need not be caused by weapons all the time. Most likely, we cause the most harm to others through action and speech. Any time we harbour dvesha or resentment towards someone else, we not only cause harm to our mind but also create a barrier to access Ishvara within.

Next comes satyam or truthfulness. The Mundaka Upanishad says "satyam eva jayati", truth alone prevails, which is also found on the seal of the Indian government. Speaking the truth is considered the highest dharma. But truth should also be communicated thoughtfully. It should be priyam or dear, not a harsh sounding truth. It should be hitam, which means it should benefit the other person. It should also be nitam, brief, short and sweet.

Akrodhaha refers to absence of anger or rage in particularly challenging situations. If someone instigates us, for example honking a horn at the traffic signal, it is difficult not to get upset. We have to learn how to keep an anger in check, especially when we know that it is our natural tendency to get upset whenever a tough situation comes up. This does not mean that we remain meek. It means that we can keep our cool while demonstrating our anger to get a certain objective done, just like a snake can hiss without actually biting anyone.

Tyaagaha refers to renunciation, it means to give up. In daanam or charity, we donate our possessions to someone else. In tyaga, we just give up our possessions. For instance, food can be given up to someone, this is daanam. But the notion that I won't eat food, this is tyaga. At the highest level, we need to renounce our sense of I, our individuality. This is because all possessions, everything that we term as mine, are nothing but upadhis or conditionings. The fewer conditionings that we identify with, the lesser will be our individuality. So

we give up the sense of mine in daanam, but we give up our sense of I in tyaaga.

The next divine quality is that of shaantihi which means tranquility or calmness. This refers to the quietening of our antahakarana, of the mind, body and intellect. Even a tiny little thought of like and dislike can agitate our antahakarana, just like a speck of dust can agitate our eyes. So just as we are careful to not let anything enter our eyes, we should train ourselves to keep our antahakarana calm. Without calmness, progress on the spiritual path is not possible.

Apaishunam refers to the absence of slander, to not find faults in others, to not gossip about others. A simple policy to follow is to not agitate others, and to not be agitated by others. Unfortunately, many of us can agitate others without even knowing it. A seemingly harmless statement that we make about someone can balloon out of proportion and cause extreme distress to that person. It is usually best to not indulge in gossip.

Next we come across dayaa bhuteshu, which means compassion for all beings. It is the ability to relate to others when they are suffering. By being compassionate towards others, we acknowledge the unity of our self, of our I with someone else's I. It does not mean we have to shed tears each time we encounter someone with sorrow. It means that we can put ourselves in someone else's shoes and see their point of view.

Aloluptvam is the ability to check our sense organs when they are near their favourite objects. Damaha, the ability to control our sense organs, is directly related to this quality. Let's say we have decided not to eat chocolates today. This vow will be tested if someone leaves a giant box of chocolates on our desk. The power of the sense organs is so strong that we will realize that we have consumed chocolates only after the fact. So the ability to prevent triggers from breaking our self control is called aloluptvam.

Maardavam means mridutaa or gentleness. It is the opposite of harshness. It is a measure of how soft, how tender one's heart is. This is why children approach their mothers for requests rather than their fathers. Hreehi refers to modesty, the ability to discern between acceptable versus unacceptable behavior, between what is right and what is wrong. Finally, achapalataa is absence of fickleness. Many of us lack the ability to sit still. Our hands and legs are always moving or twitching. Or, we tend to speak when not needed, or let our eyes wander all over. All

these are signs that we are not in control of our actions

Bhagavad Gita Verse 3, Chapter 16

*tejaha kshamaa dhritihi shauchamadroho naatimaanitaa |
bhavanti sampadam daiveemabhijaatasya bhaarata || 3 ||*

Radiance, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, lack of enmity, lack of arrogance, these are found in one who has obtained divine qualities, O Bhaarata.

tejaha : radiance
kshamaa : forgiveness
dhritihi : fortitude
shaucham : purity
adrohaha : lack of enmity
naatimaanitaa : lack of arrogance
bhavanti : are
sampadam : qualities
daiveem : divine
abhijaatasya : one who has obtained
bhaarata : O Bhaarata

Shri Krishna adds more entries into the list of divine qualities. Tejaha refers to brilliance that comes to dedicated seekers. Energy that is normally wasted through relentless contact with sense objects is conserved when we control our sense organs. Tapaha, conservation of energy, results in tejaha. Even if we control our food cravings for a short period of time, we will feel an influx of additional energy that will radiate out of our body.

A long term vow of never to get angry in the first place is termed kshamaa, which means forgiveness. If we feel someone has hurt us in any way, we want to punish him in the future. But when we forgive someone on the spot, we do not leave room for grudges to accumulate in our mind, cutting the very root of this attitude of punishment. The way to do this is to not expect any joy or sorrow from anyone or anything.

Next, we come across dhritihi which means fortitude. There will be situations in our life when our mind, body and senses will reach their breaking point. We will begin to say - I cannot take it anymore. The ability to keep holding on to our goal in the face of such fatigue is called dhritihi. It can only come out of training our mind to follow the direction of the intellect. This topic is covered in great detail in the eighteenth chapter.

Shaucham refers purity and cleanliness. External cleanliness, which means keeping our body, our surrounding and our environment clean is a given. But shaucham also refers to internal purity, which refers to keeping our mind and intellect free of likes, dislikes and attachments. Getting rid of the most stubborn dirt of the mind, ignorance of our true nature, is the highest act of cleaning we can perform.

The next quality Shri Krishna mentions is that of adroha. Here, we do not have any notion of hatred or enmity towards anyone. Droha

actually means betrayal. It is the feeling of revenge we harbour against someone who we believe has wronged us, has betrayed us. Adroha means not to harbour such feelings. When one's goal is the supreme, they will never stoop to harbour feelings of revenge against anyone.

Maanitaa refers to the notion of always demanding respect from our peers. Atimaanitaa refers to extreme arrogance, of always demanding respect from our superiors. It comes from an inflated sense of self worth, by giving emphasis to our individuality. Naatimaanita is the opposite of atimaanitaa. As our sense of individuality merges into Ishvara through constant spiritual practice, qualities that are associated with an exaggerated ego or self worth automatically correct themselves.

Shri Krishna concludes the list of divine qualities in this shloka. Very few people are born with all these qualities. So even if we focus on cultivating a handful of these qualities within ourselves, we would have made a good start.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 4, Chapter 16

*dambho darpobhimaanashcha krodhaha paarushyameva cha |
ajnyaanam chaabhijaatasya paartha sampadamaasureem || 4 ||*

Ostentation, arrogance, exaggerated self worth, and anger, insolence and also ignorance, these are found in one who has obtained devilish qualities, O Paartha.

dambhaha : ostentation
darpaha : arrogance
abhimaanaha : exaggerated self worth
cha : and
krodhaha : anger
paarushyam : insolence
eva : also
cha : and
ajnyaanam : ignorance
cha : and
abhijaatasya : one who has obtained
paartha : O Paartha
sampadam : qualities
aasureem : devilish

Having supplied a long list of divine qualities, Shri Krishna begins listing the aasuri sampatti, the devilish or diabolical qualities. Asuras are portrayed as fearsome demons with long teeth and horns in comic books and TV shows. But the word asura means one who places sense enjoyment as his highest goals. Any ordinary looking human being can be an asura, if he constantly dwells in sense pleasures.

Projecting an image of ourselves to be larger, to be different than what we really are dambaha. There are people who portray themselves to be smarter, wiser and accomplished than they really are. Or, there are others who cover up their misdeeds by portraying themselves as god fearing and so on. Broadly speaking, such people try to change what they have through cover-up rather than work hard and perform actions that will give them better results.

Darpa refers to arrogance and pride over our possessions, and the subsequent putting down of others who may not have what we have. These people not only hurt others by their insults, they hurt themselves as well. Instead of weakening their notions of me and mine, which become obstacles to spiritual growth, such people strengthen them. Krodha refers to anger. Specifically, it is the thought that gives a kind of satisfaction after having yelled at someone who has wronged us, instead of the thought that wants to solve a concern, or to help that other person.

Next, Shri Krishna mentions paarushyam, which means insolence or harshness, as a diabolical quality. Harshness can occur at the body and speech level. Elbowing our way to the front of a crowded line is harshness at the body level. Using bitter and taunting language is harshness at the speech level. Pointing out someone's faults in front of everyone is harshness at the speech level.

The primary devilish quality is that of ajnyaanam or ignorance. From

a day to day standpoint, not knowing which action is right versus which action is to be avoided, this is ignorance. Chasing momentary pleasures in the material world without regards to actions and consequences constitutes ignorances. From an absolute standpoint, it is the ignorance of our true nature as existence, awareness and joy that is the fundamental devilish quality.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 5, Chapter 16

*daivee sampadvimokshaaya nibandhaayaasuri mataa |
maa shuchaha sampadam daiveemabhijaatosi paandava || 5 ||*

Divine qualities are considered conducive to liberation, devilish qualities to bondage. Do not grieve, O Paandava. You have obtained divine qualities.

daivee : divine
sambat : qualities
vimokshaaya : to liberation
nibandhaaya : to bondage
asuri : devilish
mataa : considered
maa : do not
shuchaha : grieve
sampadam : qualities
daiveem : divine
abhijaataha : obtained
asi : you have
paandava : O Paandava

The aim of any spiritual text including the Gita is to lead the seeker onto the path of liberation. Shri Krishna now connects this chapter with the aim of the Gita. He says that we can increase the chances of our success in the spiritual path if we cultivate the divine qualities listed in this chapter, while toning down our devilish qualities. In today's day and age, it is easy to misunderstand some of these devilish qualities as essential for our survival, that without these qualities we will not get ahead in life. but it is not so.

For instance, take the quality of krodha or anger. Whenever we are in a state of anger, our intellect, our power of reasoning shuts down, as described in the second chapter. Our emotional mind takes over, and makes us perform actions that may harm us in the long run. Therefore, each time we get angry, we weaken our intellect, which is the one faculty that differentiates us from animals, and can take us closer to liberation. Akrodha, the divine quality of keeping our anger in check, prevents this from happening. We have to also keep in mind that we have to conduct self analysis and not apply this teaching to judge some other person.

Shri Krishna also anticipates a question arising in Arjuna's mind. Arjuna would have thought, am I in the divine qualities camp or in the other one. To this end, Shri Krishna consoles Arjuna. He asserts that Arjuna was always endowed with divine qualities, and that those qualities will most definitely lead him towards liberation. He addresses him as Paandava, to remind him that he comes from a lineage that has always demonstrated these divine qualities.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 6, Chapter 16

*dvau bhootasargau lokesmindaiva aasura eva cha |
daivo vishtarashaha prokta aasuram paartha me shrunu || 6 ||*

In this world, two types of beings have been created, the divine and the devilish. The divine has been described elaborately. The devilish, O Paartha, listen from me now.

Although Shri Krishna had reassured Arjuna in the previous shloka, he knew that all individuals had a mix of divine and devilish qualities in them, including Arjuna. It was not either or. The devilish qualities within Arjuna had erupted at the start of the war in the first chapter, so there was certainly room for improvement. Knowing this, Shri Krishna proceeded to describe the devilish qualities in detail in this chapter.

From our perspective, we are always struggling between progressing on the spiritual journey versus conforming to the prevalent way of life - materialism. While there is nothing inherently wrong with enjoying whatever life has to offer, society urges us sometimes to get carried away with the pursuit of materialism, without pointing out the downside of doing so. It is instructive to see how little has changed between the materialistic worldview of Shri Krishna's time and the present day.

So, from the next shloka to the end of this chapter, Shri Krishna paints a detailed picture of the materialistic world view that many of us have taken for granted. He describes the way they think and feel, their attitude towards people and objects, and the consequences of their materialistic viewpoint.

dvau : two
bhootasargau : beings have been created
loke : in world
asmin : this
daivaha : divine
aasuraha : devilish
eva : also
cha : and
daivaha : divine
vishtarashaha : elaborately
proktaha : described
aasuram : devilish
paartha : O Paartha
me : from me
shrunu : listen now

Bhagavad Gita Verse 7, Chapter 16

*pravrittim cha nivrittim cha janaa na viduraasuraahaa |
na shaucham naapi chaachaaro na satyam teshu vidyate || 7 ||*

Whether to engage or to disengage from action, those people with devilish tendencies do not know. Neither purity nor proper conduct nor truth exists in them.

Shri Krishna begins his explanation of the materialistic viewpoint by examining its value system. He says that those people who come from a purely materialistic viewpoint have a shaky value system. In other words, they do not know what to do and what not to do, when to engage in something and when not to. They focus only on artha or wealth and kaama or desire. They forget that there are two other goals in life, dharma or duty and moksha or liberation, and that each goal is to be picked up and left off at a certain stage in life.

Now, since such people are unclear about the pros and cons of everything, they are bound to do things in a haphazard and messy way. Shri Krishna says that such people do not have shaucha, they do not have purity. He refers not just to external purity but also internal. When someone does not have a systematic way of thinking through things, there is a strong chance that they will lead messy lives. Furthermore, their conduct towards others, their aacharana, will also be messy and haphazard. They will lack good manners, courtesy and politeness.

It also follows that when someone does not know the pros and cons of anything, they will not place a lot of importance on satyam, truth, doing things the right way. So if they do not get the result they want, they have no qualms in getting their results by lying, cheating and deceit. They do not want to wait for the result, because waiting takes time. If there is a shortcut, they will go for it. Such is the value system of the aasuri, the devilish, the materialistic viewpoint.

pravrittim : engaging in action
cha : and
nivrittim : disengaging from action
cha : and
janaahaa : people
na : not
viduhu : know
aasuraahaa : those with devilish tendencies
na : not
shaucham : purity
na : not
api : also
cha : and
achaaraha : proper conduct
na : not
satyam : truth
teshu : in them
vidyate : exists

Bhagavad Gita Verse 8, Chapter 16

*asatyamapratishtham te jagadaahuraneeshvaram |
 aparasparasambhootam kimanyatkaamahaitukam || 8 ||*

They say that this world is unreal, without a basis, without a god. It is born of mutual union, desire is its only cause, what else.

asatyam : unreal
 apratishtham : without basis
 te : they
 jagat : world
 aahuhu : say
 aneeshvaram : without a god
 aparasparasambhootam : born of mutual union
 kim : what
 anyat : else
 kaamahaitukam : desire is the only cause

Any philosophy, any world view has to answer some fundamental questions - who am I, what is the nature of this world, where did it come from, is there a god, and what is the relationship between the I, the world and god. In the fifteenth chapter, Shri Krishna described his worldview by answering all these questions. Here, he proceeds to describe the materialistic worldview, the worldview of the asuras, those with devilish qualities.

At its core, the materialistic viewpoint views everything as comprised of the five elements, or in today's times, atoms and molecules. So then, the answer to the questions, who am I, and what is the cause of this world, is the same. I am nothing but a combination of the five elements, and the world is also nothing but a combination of the five elements. Both are caused by the union of elements, either through chemical or biological reactions that happen due to forces of attraction, forces of desire.

Now, if the world is comprised of nothing but inert matter, one will concluded that there is no truth to it, no basis to it, nothing higher to it. A divide starts to arise between the I and the world. If the world is an inert, unreal entity, why should I treat it with care? Anything, including lying, cheating and murder, is then justified. Materialists go one step further and assert that there is no governing principle in this world, no god. So I can get away with whatever I want, because there is no law.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 9, Chapter 16

*etaam dristhimavashthaabya nashtotmaanalpabuddhayaha |
prabhavantyugrakarmaanaha kshayaaya jagatohitaahaa || 9 ||*

Holding this view, these narrow minded, lost souls who engage in acts of terror, rise as enemies of the world for its annihilation.

etaam : this
dristhim : view
avashthaabya : holding
nashtotmaanaha : lost souls
alpabuddhayaha : narrow minded
prabhavanti : rise
ugrakarmaanaha : those that engage in
acts of terror
kshayaaya : annihilation
jagataha : world
ahitaahaa : enemies

If we examine the life of any tyrant, gangster, terrorist or despot, a common theme arises. There was one moment in their life where they realized that using physical force on another person gave them power and joy. In other words, they did not have any regard for the consequences of their actions, especially when it came to harming others. Such people are the embodiment of the aasuric or the devilish tendencies.

Shri Krishna now begins to describe such people in great detail. First, he says that such people hold a petty, narrow minded view of the world. If I win, someone has to lose, this is their outlook. They have no sense of connectedness, nothing in common with anyone else. They are nashthaatmaanaha, they are lost souls. They have no concept that there is something beyond the physical body, whether it is god, soul, humanity, nationality, nothing at all.

Now when such people don't have any connection with other human beings, with the rest of the world, they have no qualms in engaging in acts of terror. We nowadays come across people who create and deploy computer viruses, bombs, chemical weapons and so on. It all begins with a seemingly simple notion - that the body is the only truth in this world, and that everything is justified in preserving one's body at the expense of someone else's.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 10, Chapter 16

*kaamamaashritya dushpooram dambhamaanamadaanvitaahaa |
mohaad griheetvaasadgraahaanpravartanteshuchivrataahaa || 10 ||*

Filled with insatiable desires, with pretentiousness, pride and arrogance, holding untrue views in delusion, they work with impure resolve.

kaamam : desires
aashritya : filled
dushpooram : insatiable
dambhaha : pretentiousness
maanaha : pride
madaanvitaahaa : with arrogance
mohaad : in delusion
griheetvaa : holding
asadgraahaan : untrue views
pravartante : work
ashuchihi : impure
vrataahaa : resolve

A major aspect of the materialistic world view is greed. Shri Krishna refers to this greed using the phrase dushpooram kaamam, meaning selfish desires that can never be satisfied or fulfilled. People who follow the materialistic world view believe that one who is without selfish desires is as good as dead. They do not believe that selfless action, work that benefits someone other than themselves, is worth anything.

This greed propels them to dambhaha or pretentiousness. They do not see the harm in putting on a show in order to gain favours or get what they want. As they accumulate more wealth and power, they feed their superiority complex, resulting in maanaha or excessive pride. When their pride reaches greater and greater heights, they become drunk with their ill-gotten accomplishments and possessions. This is mada, intoxication.

We keep coming back to the theme of ignorance and delusion, of moha, when we analyze the materialistic world view. When one cannot tell right from wrong, one begins to develop views that are not based on truth or rationality, termed in the shloka as moha-asat. It is no surprise that the activities or undertakings of such people are impure, lawless, without any consideration of duty or the big picture. Defrauding others or destroying others property are illegal in the eyes of the law, but perfectly legal from their standpoint.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 11, Chapter 16

chintaamaparimeyaam cha pralayaantaamupaashritaahaa |
kaamopabhogaparamaa etaavaditi nishchitaahaa || 11 ||

Occupied with infinite worries that end only with death, they treat desire and consumption as the highest, assured that that is all.

chintaam : worries
 aparimeyaam : infinite
 cha : and
 pralayaantaam : ending with death
 upaashritaahaa : occupied
 kaamopabhogaparamaahaa : those who
 treat desire and consumption as the
 highest
 etaavat : that is all
 iti : in this manner
 nishchitaahaa : assured

So far we saw how highly materialistic people inflict harm upon society. Now, Shri Krishna shows how they cause harm to themselves as well. He says that those devilish individuals, those with aasuri sampatti do not have even a single moment of peace. Their mind is always agitated with an infinite number of anxieties and worries. This state of affairs, this constant state of tension never ends, it goes on all the way till the end of their life.

Every selfish desire comes pre-packaged with the seed of anxiety. Why is this so? In anyone's life, there will always be one desire or another that remains unfulfilled. It is quite normal. But when we give the utmost importance to desire and consumption, when we make it the ultimate goal of life, our mind is in a constant state of agitation until each desire is fulfilled. And even if we have all the wealth and power in the world, there will always be something that we are missing, which will in turn generate anxiety.

But if our worldview incorporates something higher, if we seek a higher goal than goes beyond materialism, we expand our sense of self, our sense of I. Instead of only thinking about our own well being, we start caring about our family, our parents, our city, our nation and so on. Now it does not matter if we have to undergo any suffering, because we care about something that is higher than us. The culmination of this expansion of self happens when we begin to have faith in the highest self, Ishvara, the faith that he will ensure our well being. Consequently, our anxiety about our well being begins to diminish.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 12, Chapter 16

*aashaapaashashatairbaddhaahaa kaamakrodhaparaayanaahaa |
eehante kaamabhogaarthamanyayaenarthasanchayaan || 12 ||*

Bound by hundred ropes of desires, oriented towards desire and anger, they strive to accumulate wealth by unjust means for sensual consumption.

aashaapaashaha : ropes of desires
shataihi : hundreds
baddhaahaa : bound
kaama : desire
krodha : anger
paraayanaahaa : oriented
eehante : strive
kaamabhogaartham : sensual consumption
anyayaena : unjust
arthasanchayaan : accumulation of wealth

Every selfish desire carries a seed of anxiety within it, as we have seen. Shri Krishna says that such desires harm us in another manner. We develop attachment towards the desire, we are bound. It is as if a paasha, a lasso, a rope is tied around us on one end, and the desire on the other. Just like a cowboy puts a lasso around a horse and makes it obey his instructions, each desire makes us into a slave, makes us dance to its tune.

If this is our plight, what to talk of highly materialistic individuals. They have not one but hundreds of such ropes to bind them. If one desire is fulfilled, they have several others waiting in line. If a desire does not get fulfilled, it generates anger and agitation, causing them to inflict harm and pain upon themselves and upon others. They fall into a vicious cycle of desire, anger and greed which, given that they subscribe only to a materialistic viewpoint, is almost impossible to get out of.

So if one is continually plagued by hundreds of desires, and has a narrow outlook towards the world, what is his solution? It is money, it is accumulation of wealth, artha sanchaayan. But, in order to fulfill the infinite desires that are pulling him in several directions, there arises a need to generate wealth beyond what is legally and ethically possible. Therefore, he resorts to making money using any means necessary, legal or illegal.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 13, Chapter 16

*idamadya maya labdhamimam praapsye manoratham |
idamasteedamapi me bhavishyati punardhanam || 13 ||*

This has been gained by me now, these wishes I shall fulfill. This is mine, and this wealth shall be mine later.

In India, when a young boy gets the news that he has gained admission in the engineering college of his choice, a desire automatically pops up in his mind. Once I get through my gruelling 4 year engineering course, I will be happy. As the 4 years come to a close, another desire comes in. I need to get into a good masters program in the US. When that happens, he feels that he will be happy when he gets a US visa. Once he arrives in the US, he wants a green card. Then he wants a wife, a big house, car and so on. Each time he thinks he will be happy, another desire is waiting in line to be fulfilled.

Shri Krishna wants us to examine our own outlook and find out the level of materialism in it. So in this shloka and the following two shlokas, he uses the first person to drive this point home. Here, he wants us to inquire into what we think is our ultimate goal, our destination, our objective in life. Most of us will come to a similar conclusion that it is accumulation of wealth so that we can take care of our material desires as well as those of our family.

But this line of thinking has a flaw in it. Desires are bahushaakha, they multiply infinitely, as we have seen in earlier chapters. Each desire contains the seed of several other desires. If any of those desires is unfulfilled, we invite stress, tension and anxiety into our lives. Now it does not mean that we should not harbour any desires. It just means that we need to apply some system, some framework to ensure that desires are managed and do not get out of hand.

The four stage aashrama system (brahmachaari, grihastha, vaanaprastha and sanyaasi) prescribes the duties of an individual based on their stage in life. When duties are given importance, desires automatically manage themselves. For instance, if one is a householder, then one focuses on what is the essential set of desires for fulfilling one's duties, rather than deriving joy out of adding more and more desires. And even if some desires are unfulfilled, they do not agitate the mind because the goal is the duty, not the desire.

idam : this
adya : now
maya : I
labdham : gained
imam : these
praapsye : fulfill
manoratham : wishes
idam : this
asti : is
idam : this
api : also
me : mine
bhavishyati : will be
punaha : later
dhanam : wealth

Bhagavad Gita Verse 14, Chapter 16

*asau mayaa hataha shatrurhanishye chaaparaanapi |
eeshvarohamaham bhogee siddhoham balavaansukhee || 14 ||*

That enemy was destroyed by me, others will also be destroyed. I am the lord, I am the enjoyer, I have accomplished everything. I am mighty and happy.

If someone harbours an endless list of desires, it is impossible for all of them to be fulfilled. So then, any person who becomes an obstacle to the fulfillment of a desire automatically becomes an enemy. For instance, if another business becomes a competitor to our business, we begin to treat them as enemies instead of improving our products. That leads to all kinds of unethical and illegal ways of getting rid of our competitors, all the way up to physical harm.

Now, many people rise to political power by knocking off their competitors. They begin to think they are above the law. And since they do not believe in god, they think that they themselves are gods, and that only they can control the fate of people. They can take the law into their own hands, because they believe they are the lawmakers. Pleasure and enjoyment is their only goal. Such is the thinking of gangsters, military dictators and criminals. In the Raamaayana, Ravaana began to think like this, leading to his downfall.

Other materialistic people may not necessarily become dictators, but try to project their power and arrogance wherever possible. They say things like they can pick up the phone and call the president of the country. They have accomplished everything there is to accomplish. There is no one mightier than them. They mistake this sense of power for happiness, because they have not experienced what real happiness is. Even a simple act of name dropping indicates a deeper obsession with materialism and power.

asau : he
mayaa : by me
hataha : destroyed
shatruhu : enemy
hanishye : will destroy
cha : and
aparaan : others
api : also
eeshvaraha : lord
aham : I am
aham : I am
bhogee : enjoyer
siddhaha : accomplished one
aham : I am
balavaan : mighty
sukhee : happy

Bhagavad Gita Verse 15, Chapter 16

*aadhyobhijanavaanasmī konyosti sadrisho mayāa |
yakshye daasyaami modishya ityajnāyanavimohitaahāa || 15 ||*

**I am wealthy, I am from a good family, who else is equal to me?
I will conduct sacrifice, I will enjoy. In this manner, (he is) deluded
by ignorance.**

In the last shloka, we saw the mindset of those who derive pride from their power. Here Shri Krishna describes the mindset of people who derive pride from other things such as wealth and family. An excess of wealth, especially for those who did not come from wealthy families, is the most common source of pride. Such people boast about their latest expensive toy, their net worth, their membership in elite clubs and so on. They are only interested in consumption and enjoyment.

Others derive pride from their ancestry and their lineage. For some, this pride comes from the fact that their ancestors were kings or landowners. For some, this pride comes from the fact that everyone in their family has always been a doctor or a lawyer. Some others even boast about the number of sacrifices they have conducted and amount of charity they have donated. Instead of charity and sacrifice leading to purification of one's mind, such grandiose spectacles have gaining publicity and favours as their goal.

If we were to summarize the attitude in these three shlokas, it is this - no one is equal to me. I am superior to everyone else. So the net result is the strengthening, the hardening of the I notion, the ego, the aham. Each step taken towards the ego is one step taken away from self realization. There is no scope for detachment or renunciation. Attachment grows by leaps and bounds in such people. The root cause of all this is ignorance of one's true nature.

aadhaha : I am wealthy
abhijanavaan : good family
asmi : I am
kaha : who
anya : else
asti : is
sadrishaha : equal to
mayaa : me
yakshye : I will conduct sacrifice
daasyaami : I will conduct charity
modishya : I will enjoy
iti : in this manner
ajnāyanavimohitaahāa : deluded by
ignorance

Bhagavad Gita Verse 16, Chapter 16

*anekachittavibhraantaa mohajaalasamaavritaahaa |
 prasaktaahaa kaamabhogeshu patanti narakeshuchau || 16 ||*

**Bewildered by innumerable fancies, trapped in the web of delusion,
 addicted to desires and enjoyments, they descend into a foul hell.**

anekaha : innumerable
 vibhraantaaha : bewildered
 chitta : fancies
 mohajaala : web of delusion
 samaavritaahaa : trapped
 prasaktaahaa : addicted
 kaamabhogeshu : desires and enjoy-
 ments
 patanti : they descend
 narake : into hell
 ashuchau : foul

Over 9 percent of the population in western countries is addicted to drugs. Drug addiction begins when a person has some problem, discomfort or sorrow, such as a teenager finding it difficult to fit in or an adult losing his job. Using drugs or alcohol appears to solve the problem, so he uses them repeatedly. At this point, his body gets habituated to the drugs or alcohol and consequently shuts down all logic and reason. The person has become an addict. His sole aim in life is to do whatever it takes to satisfy his cravings.

Shri Krishna summarizes the lifecycle of a person with devilish tendencies, which looks worryingly similar to that of a drug addict. The person in question has an underlying sense of incompleteness or sorrow. Fulfilling a selfish desire, no matter how insignificant, gives him a temporary burst of joy. He wants to repeat this sensation, he wants more of it, and thus becomes addicted to desires and enjoyments. The more he does so, the more power he gives to his emotional mind, and takes power from his reasoning and intellect. He is trapped in the web of delusion. All he can think about now is more and more desires to fulfill, and the means to fulfill them.

Whether or not a drug addict or a highly materialistic person literally falls into hell is a different story. But a life of addiction, a life where inert substances make us dance to their tune, a life where there is no higher aim or goal, and most importantly, a life where the intellect has taken a backseat, is no different than any hell with fire and brimstone in it.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 17, Chapter 16

aatmasambhaavitaahaa stabdhaa dhanamaanamadaanvitaahaa |
yajante naamayajnaiste dambhenaavidhipoorvakam || 17 ||

Self praising, stubborn, filled with intoxication of wealth and fame, they, arrogantly and unsystematically, conduct sacrifices for name only.

aatmasambhaavitaahaa : self praising
 stabdhaa : stubborn
 dhanamaanamadaanvitaahaa : filled
 with intoxication of wealth and fame
 yajante : conduct
 naamayajnaihi : sacrifices for name only
 te : they
 dambhena : arrogantly
 avidhipoorvakam : unsystematically

When one is overly materialistic, one is always engaged in a constant game of one-upmanship with one's rivals. Such people put in a lot of effort to create the impression that they are always one step ahead with regards to wealth, power and achievements as compared to their rivals. Shri Krishna paints a picture of this game of one upmanship in this shloka. He examines how such people perform sacrificial rituals. Let us look at the broader meaning of the term sacrifice, which means any activity undertaken for the greater good of society, commonly termed social service.

For instance, imagine that an extremely materialistic individual, one who has devilish qualities, announces that he will build a school in an impoverished village. First of all, whether the individual is qualified to build a school or not does not matter. He will praise himself and claim that he is qualified. He will probably not take advice from others, given his stubborn nature. He will make a big announcement in the media, but the emphasis will be on the charitable qualities of the founder than of the school he is building.

When in year or so, the hype of the media has died down, and students start attending the school, all kinds of irregularities are discovered. The building construction is faulty. There is no proper budget for hiring good teachers. The money raised for this effort has been funnelled into questionable channels. In a nutshell, the entire effort has been conducted unsystematically, only for the temporary image enhancement of the founder in the media. As with the other scenarios we have seen in this chapter, the root of all this is the intoxication of wealth and fame.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 18, Chapter 16

*ahankaaram balam darpam kaamam krodham cha samshritaahaa |
maamaatmaparadeheshu pradvishantobhyasooyakaahaa || 18 ||*

Taking refuge in egotism, power, arrogance, desire and anger, these resentful people hate me, who dwells in one's own and in other's bodies.

ahankaaram : egotism
balam : power
darpam : arrogance
kaamam : desire
krodham : anger
cha : and
samshritaahaa : taking refuge
maam : me
pradvishantaha : hate
abhyasooyakaahaa : resentful people

Shri Krishna starts to summarize the list of aasuri sampatti or devilish qualities by highlighting the primary ones. The foremost devilish quality is egotism. Considering anything other than the eternal essence as the I is egotism. For most of us, the I is our body and mind. This incorrect understanding comes from avidyaa or ignorance of our true nature. In the Mahabhaarata, ignorance is symbolically represented by the blind king Dhritarashtra, and egotism by his first child Duryodhana, the cause of the Mahabhaarata war.

When egotism or the I notion is strong, one tends to impose one's will on others. This is balam or power. One tends to disregard one's duties, rules and norms, lose all sense of right and wrong, due to the strength of egotism. This is darpam or arrogance. Their primary aim of life becomes kaama or selfish desire, resulting in krodha or anger when these desires are not fulfilled. Other devilish tendencies such as hypocrisy, pride and ostentation are variations of these primary qualities. We should always be on the lookout for the rise of such qualities in us.

Shri Krishna goes on to say that such people hate Ishvara who dwells in everyone, including the very people who are harbouring these devilish qualities. They never listen to Ishvara who, as the voice of conscience, pleads them to not fall prey to these qualities. They do not follow the instructions of Ishvara as laid down in the scriptures. Instead, they resent him and hate him, as well as those who follow his path by cultivating divine qualities.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 19, Chapter 16

*taanaham dvishataha krooraansamsareshu naraadhamaan |
kshipaamyajastramashubhaanaasureeshoeva yonishu || 19 ||*

Those who are hateful, cruel, they are wretched in this world. Definitely, I cast such inauspicious people into devilish wombs, repeatedly.

taan : those
aham : aham
dvishataha : hateful people
krooraan : cruel people
samsareshu : in this world
naraadhamaan : wretched people
kshipaami : I cast
ajastram : repeatedly
ashubhaan : inauspicious people
aasureeshu : devilish
eva : definitely
yonishu : wombs

What happens to people who, through their devilish behaviour, cause trouble to everyone and everything around them? Shri Krishna says that through their behaviour, such people become naraadhamaan, the lowest of the humans, the most wretched category of people in this world. They mistakenly think that they are above the law. But they are not above the law of karma. Ishvara ensures that such people get the punishment that they deserve, which is rebirth into devilish wombs such as those of animals and insects.

Let us first examine the symbolic meaning of this shloka. As we have seen in earlier chapters, we are at our best when the intellect has supremacy over our senses and our mind. But in people with devilish attributes, this picture becomes topsy turvy. The senses rule over the intellect. Logic, reason, duty, all such characteristics of the intellect are suppressed. Only sensual consumption takes precedence.

Now let's look at the shloka. Each time someone gives precedence to their senses as opposed to their intellect, their ego, their sense of I, ties yet another knot, makes yet another association with the senses. Symbolically, each time this happens, they take birth in a devilish womb. This situation cannot carry on for a while. History is full of tyrants and dictators who let their greed get the better of them, made one miscalculation, and died horrible deaths at the hands of their subjects or their enemies.

Literally, this shloka asserts the working of the law of karma. Out of nowhere, we find that we experience unexpected professional success, monetary and personal gains. Similarly, we find that unexpectedly, we have to go through a rough, painful patch. Good or bad actions that we have performed in our present life, or perhaps in a previous life, always bring their consequences back to us. In fact, whenever we are going through a rough patch, we should be glad that the consequences of our bad actions are getting exhausted.

Similarly, people who commit devilish actions also get their payback. But their payback is harsher than what most of us go through. Shri Krishna says that such people take birth into species such as animals and insects. In such species, there is no scope for using the intellect to gain self realization and liberation. Only humans have this ability. Any state where we cannot access the intellect, whether we are in a human form or not, is the worst punishment possible.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 20, Chapter 16

*aasureem yonimaapannaa moodhaa janmani janmani |
maamapraapyaiva kaunteya tato yaantyadhamaam gatim || 20 ||*

Entering into devilish wombs, the deluded individuals, from birth after birth, do not attain me, O Kaunteya. They attain destinations even lower than that (state).

aasureem : devilish
yonim : wombs
aapannaahaa : entering
moodhaa : deluded individuals
janmani : birth
janmani : birth
maam : me
apraapyaiva : do not attain
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
tataha : than that
yaanti : go
adhamaam : even lower
gatim : destinations

Here, Shri Krishna expresses his regret about a lost opportunity. Anyone who has attained a human birth has a chance to achieve self realization and liberation. But those individuals who engage in destruction of others instead of improving their state give up this golden opportunity. Such people enter a never ending descent into lower and lower realms of existence. An example given in most commentaries is that of kumbhipaaka, where individuals spend their time in a pot of boiling oil.

Such is the rare and special nature of a human birth, that most spiritual masters have mentioned it in their texts. Shankaraacharya begins the Vivekachoodamani text with this proclamation : "For beings a human birth is hard to win, then manhood and holiness, then excellence in the path of wise law; hardest of all to win is wisdom. Discernment between Self and not-Self, true judgment, nearness to the Self of the Eternal and Freedom are not gained without a myriad of right acts in a hundred births".

The practical implication of this shloka is the importance of free will. Only a human has the ability to shape his or her destiny. Plants, animals and birds cannot do so. All they can do is follow their instincts and their sense organs. If we also start ignoring our intellect and empowering our sense organs, there remains no difference between us and animals. We lose all traces of sattva, and only exist through rajas and tamas.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 21, Chapter 16

*trividham narakasyedam dvaaram naashanamaatmanaha |
kaamaha krodhastathaa lobhastasmaadetatrayam tyajet || 21 ||*

trividham : three
narakasya : hell
idam : these
dvaaram : gates
naashanam : destructive
aatmanaha : oneself
kaamaha : desire
krodhaha : anger
tathaa : and
lobhaha : greed
asmaat : therefore
etat : these
atrayam : three
tyajet : give up

Three gates of hell cause one's destruction, desire, anger and greed. Therefore, give up these three.

Like a good teacher, Shri Krishna summarizes the entire chapter comprising the rather lengthy list of devilish qualities into three main ones: desire, anger and greed. He says that we always need to watch out for these three qualities in our daily lives, and minimize them as much as possible. He calls them gateways into hell, because they lead to the path of destruction rather than the path of liberation. Even the order of these three is important, because both anger and greed follow desire.

The second chapter explained how kaama or desire comes into our lives. Dhyavato vishayaan, by constantly thinking of an object (or a person or a situation), we develop an association with it. If carried on for long, this association results in a desire to procure that object. If anyone or anything comes between us and the object, we develop anger. And once we have the object, once our desire is fulfilled, we want more of the object. This results in greed.

So then, how do we tackle these three gates of hell? Let us first look at kaama or desire. If desire develops through contemplation of objects, we can reduce desire to a certain extent by keeping a watch on what we expose our mind to. For example, we can go to the mall with a shopping list rather than wander around shops that we don't need anything from. But the root of desire is the labelling of objects as desirable by our mind. This labelling or superimposition is known as "shobhana adhyaasa". It is why the same dress looks desirable to one person and irrelevant to another, since objects by themselves are not desirable. Controlling and convincing the mind through study of scriptures and meditation helps to reduce this labelling.

Desire is somewhat easy to control, but once we are in the grip of anger, it becomes somewhat difficult to do so. At least we do not publicly display our desires, but we do not hesitate to show our anger publicly. We require tremendous control over our mind in order to release ourselves from the grip of anger. It is therefore better to focus

on rooting out unnecessary desires than to confront anger directly.

Lastly, lobha or greed can be kept in check through charity. Anytime we start feeling pride over our wealth or possessions, we should immediately donate a portion of our wealth or possessions. How exactly we should do so is covered in the next chapter.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 22, Chapter 16

*etaivimuktaha kaunteya tamodvaaraistribhinaraha |
aacharatyaatmanaha shreyastato yaati paraam gatim || 22 ||*

etaihi : these
vimuktaha : free
kaunteya : O Kaunteya
tamodvaaraihi : gates of darkness
tribhihi : three
naraha : one who
aacharati : does
aatmanaha : himself
shreyaha : good
tataha : with that
yaati : attains
paraam : supreme
gatim : goal

One who is free from these, the three gates of darkness, does good to himself, O Kaunteya, and with that, attains the supreme goal.

Shri Krishna describes the fate of one who has successfully conquered desire, anger and greed, the three gates of tamas or darkness. He says that such a person, from a practical standpoint, puts his life on the right track, he does good to himself. From an absolute standpoint, such a person attains the supreme goal of self realization, of oneness with Ishvara, instead of entrapment in the never ending cycle of birth and death.

With this shloka, the message of the entire sixteenth chapter is summarized and concluded. Most of us, given the materialistic nature of the world, are on the path of preyas, the pleasant, the path of continuous satisfaction of selfish desires. Shri Krishna urges us to slowly tune down the three devilish qualities of desire, anger and greed, so that we can start walking on the path of shreyas or the auspicious, the path of the divine qualities. Only then do we become qualified to attain the supreme goal of self realization.

Having heard this, we probably have a question that arises in our minds. Every second of our lives, we are bombarded with a ton of desires. If our awareness level is high, we can regulate them some of the time, but not all of the time. Furthermore, anger can erupt and take over our mind within a microsecond. How can we, on our own, control desire, anger and greed? It is not easy. Anticipating this question, Shri Krishna answers it in the next shloka.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 23, Chapter 16

*yaha shaastravidhimutsrija vartate kaamakaarataha |
na sa siddhimavaapnoti na sukham na paraam gatim || 23 ||*

He who dismisses the laws of scripture and conducts himself according to impulses of desire, he neither attains success, nor happiness, nor the supreme goal.

yaha : he who
shaastravidhim : laws of scripture
utsrija : dismisses
vartate : conducts
kaamakaarataha : impulse of desire
na : not
saha : he
siddhim : success
avaapnoti : attain
na : not
sukham : happiness
na : not
paraam : supreme
gatim : goal

Imagine that we have to assemble a complex piece of furniture. Most people will follow the instructions given in the manual that comes in the box. But, for some reason, let's say we ignore the manual and build what we want based on a whim. What will be the outcome? We will be unsuccessful in building a functional piece of furniture. Consequently, we will not be happy with this outcome. Without following the manual, we neither gain success nor attain happiness.

Shri Krishna says that if we live our lives based solely on our desires, we will neither attain success in any worldly endeavour, nor will we attain worldly happiness. The supreme goal of self realization then is totally out of the question. Unfortunately, whenever we feel disillusioned, we usually seek guidance from the latest self help book, or try to emulate the lives of those who have had significant material prosperity. Such guidance may get us temporary happiness in a small part of our life, but will never solve our predicament holistically.

So then, what is the solution? Shri Krishna points us to the Vedas, the scriptures, as a guide towards checking our selfish desire-oriented life. He is in no way advocating a dogmatic, ideological or blind faith oriented lifestyle that imposes restrictions upon society. The Gita, in fact, presents the very principles of the Vedas in a format that is meant for practical individuals. The notion of svadharma, of following a career path that is in line with our interests and our qualifications, is a perfect example of guidance from the scriptures.

Bhagavad Gita Verse 24, Chapter 16

*tasmaachhaastraam pramaanam te karyaakaaryavyavasthitau |
jnyaatvaa shaastravidhaanoktam karmam kartumihaarhasi || 24 ||*

Therefore, the scripture is the authority to guide you towards what is to be not and what is not. Knowing this, you should perform actions according to scripture here.

tasmaat : therefore
shaastraam : scripture
pramaanam : authority
te : you
karyaakaaryavyavasthitau : guide to
what is to be done and what not
jnyaatvaa : knowing this
shaastravidhaanoktam : according to
scripture
karmam : actions
kartum : perform
iha : here
arhasi : should

Shri Krishna concludes the sixteenth chapter with this shloka. He says that ultimately it is the prompter of our actions, our motivation, that determine whether we are behaving as divine entities or as devilish ones. If the prompter of our actions is selfish desire, we are heading in the wrong direction. If the prompter is scripture, we are heading in the right direction. Therefore, when in doubt, we should refer to the guidelines in the scriptures on the performance of actions.

A case in point is Arjuna's fundamental question: is it right to harm another individual? A soldier of the army defending his country and a gangster shooting at a crowd are performing the same action - killing people. But the difference is the prompter of both those actions. The soldier is prompted by duty to his country, whereas the gangster is prompted by greed. Where did the soldier's duty come from? We could say that it came from the army's code of conduct. We could say that it come from the constitution of his country. We could say that it came from the values cultivated by his parents.

In all these cases, the soldier's sense of duty came from a set of guidelines that were founded on something that was much larger than the narrow viewpoint of one individual, that kept the bigger picture in mind. This is what Shri Krishna refers to as scripture. Using the word "here" in the shloka, he reminds Arjuna that such intelligent living is only possible in a human birth, not in any other birth. Now, we come to an interesting question? Which authority, which scripture should one follow? In this day and age, how can one practically lead an intelligent life that follows a selfless set of guidelines, that follows a scripture? This intriguing question is tackled in the next chapter.

*om tatsatiti shreematbhagavatgitasupanishadsu brahmavidyaayaam yo-
gashaastre shreekrishnaarjunsamvade daivaasurasampadvibhaagayogo naama
shodashodhyaaya || 14 ||*

Summary of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 16

The theme of the sixteenth chapter is the analysis of divine and devilish qualities that are present in every human being. Shri Krishna begins by listing all of the divine qualities such as fearlessness and purity of mind. He then provides a similar but brief list of devilish qualities such as ostentation and arrogance. He underscores the point that the divine qualities are a stepping stone towards self realization and liberation, but the devilish qualities are a slippery slope towards never-ending bondage and sorrow.

Next, the philosophy of materialists is analyzed in great detail, because extreme materialism is considered no different than devilish nature. At its core, materialists do not believe in any overarching humanitarian laws or values, since they see the world as nothing but a combination of elements. Material gain is the sole aim of their lives. Anyone or anything that comes in their aim is a target for annihilation.

Shri Krishna says that such people are steeped in delusion and ignorance. Instead of bringing happiness, their infinite desires only bring them infinite worries. These infinite desires bind them and prod them to illegal and unethical means of accumulating wealth. What should I acquire next, whom should I harm next, this becomes their thinking. They develop extreme arrogance and pride towards their family, their wealth and their actions. They totally sever any association with whatever little values and conscience in them.

Such people never realize that by hating everyone they hate Ishvara who dwells in everyone and everything, who is the support of this creation. Although such people think that they are above all laws, they are not above the law of karma. They get the results of their actions in this life and several others to come. Caring only for themselves, they have begun behaving like animals even when they are human. Therefore they are cast into an endless cycle of births and deaths as animals, insects and other creatures.

Shri Krishna ends this chapter with an extremely practical message. He gives us a simple formula that will give us peace and happiness in this world, and also put us on a fast track to liberation. All we need to do is to avoid the three gates of hell which are desire, anger and greed. We do so by making scripture become the motivator and the prompter of our actions and not selfish desire.

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